SERMONS

PREACHED AT

LINCOLN'S-INN,

Between the Years 1765 and 1776:

WITH

A LARGER DISCOURSE,

On Chriſt's *driving the Merchants out of the Temple*; in which the nature and end of that famous tranſaction is explained.

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MDCCLXXVI.

CMC
MVSEVM
BRITANNICVM

TO

THE WORSHIPFUL

THE MASTERS OF THE BENCH

OF THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY

OF

LINCOLN'S-INN,

THIS VOLUME,

IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF

THEIR MANY AND GREAT FAVOURS,

IS, WITH SINCERE RESPECT AND GRATITUDE,

INSCRIBED BY THEIR MUCH OBLIGED

AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,

R. LICHFIELD AND COVENTRY.

GREAT RUSSEL STREET,
BLOOMSBURY, NOV. 7,
1776.

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* The ſubſtance of this Diſcourſe was delivered in a Sermon at Lincoln's-Inn, May 15, 1768.

SER-

SERMON I.

Preached Feb. 3, 1771.

St. MATTH. xiii. 51, 52.

Jeſus ſaith unto them, Have ye underſtood all theſe things? They ſay unto him, Yea, Lord. Then ſaid he unto them, Therefore every ſcribe which is inſtructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an houſeholder, which bringeth forth out of his treaſure things new and old.

IF there be any difficulty in theſe words, it will be removed by conſidering the *manners* of that time, in which Jeſus lived, and the *ideas* of thoſe perſons, to whom he addreſſed himſelf.

The Iſraelites were a plain, frugal people; abundantly ſupplied with all things needful to the convenient ſupport of life, but very ſparingly with ſuch as come under the notion of ornaments or ſuperfluities. They drew their means of ſubſiſtence chiefly from paſturage, agriculture, and other rural occupations. Gold and ſilver was ſcarce among the antient Jews; and the leſs neceſſary to them, as they had little traffic among themſelves, and ſtill leſs with their pagan neighbours; the wiſdom of their Law having purpoſely reſtrained, and, upon the matter, prohibited, all the gainful ways of commerce.

Now, to a people, thus circumſtanced, unfurniſhed, in a good degree, with arts and manufactures, and but ſlenderly provided with the *means of exchange* for the commodities they produce; management, thrift, and what we call *good huſbandry*, muſt have been a capital virtue. *Houſeholders* were eſpecially concerned to hoard up, and keep by them, in readineſs,

all

all ſuch things as might be requiſite either to cloath or feed their reſpective families. And therefore, as they were continually making freſh additions to their ſtock, ſo they carefully preſerved what things they had, provided they were of a nature to be preſerved, although time and uſe had impaired the grace, or diminiſhed the value, of them. Thus, they had things *new and old* laid up in their ſtore-houſe, or *treaſury* (for theſe proviſions were indeed their *treaſure*), which, as the text ſays, they could *bring forth*, on any emergency that called for them.

And to this Jewiſh *Houſeholder*, thus furniſhed and prepared for all occaſions, our Lord compares *the ſcribe, inſtructed unto the kingdom of heaven*, in other words, the miniſter, or preacher of the Goſpel. Every ſuch *ſcribe* was to be ſuitably provided with what might be ſerviceable to thoſe committed to his charge: And the Text delivers it, as *a general inference* from the example of Chriſt himſelf (who, from

a variety of topics, ſome *new*, ſome *old*, had been inſtructing his diſciples in this chapter), that WE, the teachers of his religion, ſhould likewiſe have in ſtore a variety of knowledge for the ſupply of his church, and that we ſhould not be backward or ſparing, as we ſee occaſion, in the uſe of it. THEREFORE, ſays he, that is, *for this end*[a] that your reſpective charges may be well and perfectly inſtructed by you, as you have been by me, *every ſcribe, which is inſtructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an houſeholder, which bringeth forth out of his treaſure things new and old.*

It is true, if this inſtruction of our Lord and Maſter had concerned *only* the preachers of the word, I might have found a fitter place and occaſion for a diſcourſe upon it. But the caſe is much

[a] διὰ τοῦτο—referring to the good effect of this way of teaching on the diſciples, whom it had enabled, as they confeſſed, to *underſtand* the things, which Jeſus had taught them.

other-

otherwiſe; and it concerns *all* the faithful to underſtand what the duty of thoſe is, who are intruſted to diſpenſe the word of life, leſt they take offence at the miniſtry, without cauſe, and ſo deprive themſelves of the fruit which they might otherwiſe reap from it.

Let me therefore lay before you ſome plain conſiderations on the aphoriſm in the text; and ſubmit it to yourſelves how far they may deſerve the notice of all Chriſtians.

It would be ridiculous, no doubt, to torture a mere figure of ſpeech; and to purſue a metaphor through all the minute applications, which an ordinary imagination might find or invent for it. But I ſhall not be ſuſpected of trifling in this ſort, when I only conclude, from the compariſon of a *Chriſtian Scribe* to the *Jewiſh Houſeholder*;

I. That all the treaſures of knowledge, which the MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL

may have laid up in his mind, are deſtined, *not to the purpoſes of vanity, but to the uſe of his charge*; for ſuch muſt have been the intention of a reaſonable *Houſeholder*, in the ſtock of proviſions he had ſo carefully collected:

II. That ſuch uſe muſt be eſtimated from the apparent *wants of thoſe, to whom this knowledge is diſpenſed*; for ſo the frugal *houſeholder* expends his proviſions on thoſe who evidently ſtand in need of them: And

III. Laſtly, That among theſe wants, ſome, at certain conjunctures, may be *more general*, or *more preſſing*, than ordinary; and then his firſt care muſt be to relieve theſe, though other real, and perhaps conſiderable wants, be, for the preſent, neglected by him: juſt, again, as the diſcreet *houſeholder* is anxious to provide againſt an uncommon diſtreſs that befalls his whole family, or the greater

part

part of it, or that threatens the immediate deſtruction of thoſe whom it befalls, though he ſuſpend his care, for a ſeaſon, of particular, or leſs momentous diſtreſſes.

In theſe THREE reſpects, then, I propoſe to illuſtrate and enforce the compariſon of the Text, without any apprehenſion of being thought to do violence to it.

I. The knowledge of a *well-inſtructed Scribe* muſt be directed to the edification of his charge, and not at all to the gratification of his own vanity.

This concluſion reſults immediately from the *ſubject* of the compariſon. For the *Chriſtian Scribe* is not compared to a *prince*, who is allowed, and even expected, to conſult his own ſtate and magnificence; or, to one of thoſe popular *magiſtrates* in antient times, whoſe office it was to exhibit ſplendid ſhews, and furniſh expenſive entertainments, to their fellow-citizens: but to a plain Jewiſh *houſeholder*, who had nothing to regard beyond the neceſſary, or,

at moſt, decent accommodation of his family.

And the compariſon is *aptly* made, as we ſhall ſee if we conſider, either the *end* of a preacher's office, or the *decorum* of his character.

His OFFICE obliges him to intend the moſt eſſential intereſts of mankind, the reformation of their lives, and the ſalvation of their ſouls. And, when the object of his care is ſo important, what wonder if all inferior conſiderations fall before it?

Beſides, the Chriſtian preacher has a *commiſſion* to diſcharge, a divine *meſſage* to deliver. And in ſuch a caſe, men look not for ingenuity, but fidelity. An antient, or a modern ſophiſt may make what excurſions he thinks fit into the wide fields of ſcience; and may entertain us with his learning, or his wit, as he finds himſelf able. He *may*, I ſay, do this; for he has only to recommend himſelf to our eſteem, and to acquire a little popular reputation.

But

But WE have *a diſpenſation* committed to us, *a form of ſound words*, from which we muſt not depart, *a doctrine*, which we are to deliver with *uncorruptneſs*, *gravity*, *ſincerity*[b]. WE pleaſe not men, but God; or if men, *to their good*, only, *to edification*[c].

The DECORUM of our character requires, too, that we be ſuperior to all the arts of vanity and oſtentation. Even in ſecular profeſſions, it is expected that this rule of propriety be obſerved. A *Phyſician* would be ridiculous, that was more curious in penning a preſcription, than in weighing the matter of it: and the *Advocate* would be little eſteemed, that ſhould be more ſolicitous to diſplay himſelf, than to ſerve his client. How much more then may it be expected from *a preacher of righteouſneſs*, that HE ſhould forget his own perſonal importance amid the high concerns of his profeſſion!

[b] Tit. ii. 7.
[c] Rom. xv. 2.

And

And ſuch was indeed the conduct of our beſt guides, in the miniſtry. The antient Fathers were, many of them, richly furniſhed with all the endowments, that might be required to ſet themſelves off to the utmoſt advantage. Yet we find them, in their homilies and diſcourſes to the people, inattentive to every thing but their main end; delivering themſelves, with an energy indeed, but a plainneſs and even negligence of expreſſion [d], that tempts frivolous readers, ſometimes, to make a doubt of their real, and, from other mo-

[d] They did this with deſign, and on principle; as appears from St. Auſtin's Diſcourſe *de Doctrinâ Chriſtianâ*, in which he inſtructs the Chriſtian preacher to employ, on ſome occaſions, inelegant and even barbarous terms and expreſſions, the better to ſuit himſelf to the apprehenſions of his leſs informed hearers—*non curante illo, qui docet, quantâ eloquentiâ doceat, ſed quantâ evidentiâ. Cujus evidentiæ diligens appetitus aliquando negligit verba cultiora, nec curat quid benè ſonet, ſed quid benè indicet atque intimet quod oſtendere intendit*—and what follows. *L.* iv. *p.* 74. *Ed. Eraſm. t.* iii.

numents

numents of their ſkill and pains, unqueſtioned abilities.

And, in this contempt of ſecular fame, they did but copy the example of St. Paul himſelf, the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles; who, though diſtinguiſhed by the ſublimeſt parts, though profound in his knowledge of the Law, and not unacquainted with Gentile learning, affected no diſplay either of his natural or acquired talents, but, as he tells us himſelf (and his writings atteſt the truth of his declaration), *determined to know nothing*, among the faithful, *ſave Jeſus Chriſt and him crucified*[e].

Not that what abilities we have, are always to lie concealed. There are occaſions, no doubt, when they may properly, that is, uſefully, be exerted. But the miniſter of the Goſpel does not go in queſt of ſuch occaſions: he only adapts himſelf to them, when they come in his way;

[e] 1 Cor. ii. 2.

and

and then purſues them no farther than the end, he has in view, the edification of others, not his own credit, demands from him.

By this rule, the preachers of the word are to conduct themſelves. By the ſame rule, it will, therefore, be but juſt to eſtimate their charitable labours; and, when we ſee nothing to admire in them, to conclude, That this plainneſs of character may not be always owing to incapacity, but ſometimes, at leaſt, to diſcretion and the higher regards of duty.

And this candour, as liable as it is to miſinterpretation, will not be thought exceſſive, if you reflect, that, as, in general, they are bound to conſult the good of their charge, and to deliver nothing to their auditors, but what they foreſee, or preſume at leaſt, will be *uſeful* to them: So

II. in the next place, The *degree* of that utility muſt be regarded by the prudent diſpenſer of God's word, and can only be

be eſtimated by the apparent *wants* of thoſe, to whom his inſtructions are addreſſed.

It is an eſpecial part of the *houſeholder's* prudence to take care, that his treaſure be laid out on thoſe, who have moſt need of it. He has enough to do, perhaps, to ſatisfy the more preſſing demands of his domeſtics; and the rules of a good œconomy require that he regard thoſe, before their humourous inclinations, or even their more tolerable neceſſities. To ſpeak in Jewiſh ideas, He, that wants a *coat*, to defend himſelf from the injuries of the weather, muſt be ſupplied with that neceſſary garment, though he go without a *cloak*; or, when a piece of *bread* is called for, it muſt be adminiſtered to the hungry, though others be made to wait for their delicacies of *milk* and *honey*; or, a lamb from the fold may be ſerved up at an ordinary feaſt, while the *fatted calf* is reſerved for ſome more ſolemn occaſion.

Juſt

Juſt thus it is in the diſpenſation of the word. We apply ourſelves, firſt and principally, to relieve the more importunate demands of our hearers; and, not being able, at the ſame time, to provide for all, we prefer the caſe of thoſe who are ſtarving for the want of neceſſary inſtruction, to that of others who are in a condition to ſubſiſt on what hath already been imparted to them.

Hence it is, that we are moſt frequent in preſſing the fundamental truths of the Goſpel: as well knowing, that very many have yet to learn, or at leaſt to digeſt, the firſt principles of their religion; and that few, in compariſon, are either prepared, or enough diſpoſed, *to go on to perfection.*

There are thoſe, perhaps, who expect us to clear up ſome nice point of caſuiſtry, or to lay open to them the grounds and reaſons of ſome obnoxious article in the Chriſtian Creed: in a word, they would take it kindly of us, if, dropping the common topics, which have been long and much worn

worn in the ſervice of religion, we provided ſome freſh ones, for their entertainment; and inſtead of the ſtale fragments, which are always at hand, and lie open to all the family, we ſerved up to them ſomething of better taſte from the inner rooms of our ſtore-houſe, where our choiceſt viands are laid up. All this is extremely well: and in due ſeaſon, ſo far as is fitting, the charitable diſpenſer of God's word will not be wanting to their expectations; for he has gathered nothing, however rare or exquiſite, in the courſe of his *houſehold* induſtry, of which he does not wiſh them to partake. But, for the preſent, he finds this indulgence to be out of place: he ſees, that the plaineſt duties of life, and the moſt unqueſtioned articles of the faith, are, firſt of all, to be inculcated: he perceives, that numbers want to be put in mind of old practical truths: and perhaps he underſtands, that even thoſe, who are the moſt forward to call out for novelties in ſpeculation, do not make this demand

mand with the beſt grace. He could amuſe them, it may be, with a curious theological Lecture: but what if their ſenſe of divine things be dead? what if they want to have their minds ſtimulated by the admonitions, and their conſciences alarmed with the terrors, of the Goſpel?

The queſtion is not put at hazard. For ſo, the Roman Governor was impatient *to hear St. Paul concerning the faith in Chriſt*; when yet the Apoſtle choſe to *reaſon* with him *of righteouſneſs, temperance, and a judgement to come:* plain moral topics, ſuch as he had often heared diſcuſſed in the ſchools of philoſophy; but now reſumed to good purpoſe, for in the end, we are told, *Felix trembled.*

Even, in the caſe of thoſe, who may be decent in their lives, who are enough inſtructed in what is called morality, nay, and would take it ill to be thought wanting in a competent ſhare of religious knowledge, a diſcourſe on *the elements of the faith* may not be, altogether, unſeaſonable.

able. For there are, of theſe, who exclude *Religion*, from their ſcheme of morality; or *Chriſtianity*, from their ſcheme of religion; or who, profeſſing Chriſtianity, ſcarce know what *Redemption* means: who are yet to learn with what awful, yet filial piety, they are to look up to God *the Father*; who reflect not, what tranſcendant honour is due from them to God *the Son*; and who have ſcarce, perhaps, heared, or have little regarded, whether there *be any Holy Ghoſt*.

If any ſuch attend our aſſemblies, think not much that we are ready to impart to them the plaineſt, the commoneſt, becauſe the moſt *neceſſary*, inſtruction: and, though we would conſult the wants of all, you are not to be ſurprized, or diſguſted, if we run to the relief of thoſe, firſt, who want our aſſiſtance moſt; and, like the good *houſeholder*, beſtow our *old things* on the needy and indigent, before we expend our *new* on the curious and delicate; who might, we will ſay, be

better accommodated with them, but are not, in the mean time, deſtitute of what is needful to their ſpiritual life. But

III. This care is more eſpecially required of the Chriſtian Scribe, when his charge is expoſed, in certain conjunctures, to new and extraordinary wants, which, if not relieved in the inſtant, may grow to be ruinous and abſolutely fatal: then, above all, he is to conſider, not what inſtruction is moſt acceptable to his hearers, but what their critical ſituation demands.

For, here again, the example of the watchful and beneficent *houſeholder*, is our direction. The ſeaſon may be uncommonly ſevere and inclement: or, a dangerous, perhaps a contagious diſeaſe, afflicts his family; and then the warmeſt, although the coarſeſt, clothing muſt be ſought out for the *naked*; and not the moſt palatable, but the moſt wholſome food, muſt be adminiſtered to the *ſick*.

Diſaſters, like theſe, ſometimes befall the houſehold of Chriſt. A cold atheiſtic

ſpirit

ſpirit prevails, and chills the vital principles of all virtue, as well as religion: or, a peſtilent hereſy ſpreads its venom through the church, and turns the medicine of life itſelf, the ſalutary inſtruction of God's word, unleſs prepared and applied by ſkillful hands, into a deadly poiſon. Then it is that the well-appointed Scribe emulates the generous care and pains of the good *houſeholder*; and whatever he has in ſtore, of antient or modern collection, whether of philoſophy or criticiſm, whether of eloquent perſuaſion or ſound logic, all muſt be brought forth, to warm the piety, or to purify the faith, of his hearers.

We, of this nation, have not been ſo happy as to want examples of ſuch diſtreſſes.

1. The fanatical ſects, that ſprung up in abundance amid the confuſions of the laſt century, had ſo corrupted the word of God by their impure gloſſes on the Goſpel-doctrine of Grace, that the age

became immoral on principle, and, under the name of *Saints*, engendered a hateful brood of profligate *Antinomians*; that is, a ſort of Chriſtians, if they may be ſo called, *who turned the grace of God into licentiouſneſs*, and, to magnify his goodneſs, very conſcientiouſly tranſgreſſed his Laws. In a word, they taught, that the *elect* were above ordinances, and might be ſaved without, nay in defiance of, the moral Law.

This horrid divinity ſtruck ſo directly at the root of all true religion, that it could not but alarm the zeal of good men. Accordingly, about the time of the Reſtoration, and for ſome years after it, a number of eminent Divines (and ONE eſpecially, well known, and deſervedly honoured, in this place [f]) bent all their nerves to expoſe and confound ſo pernicious a hereſy: and with ſo invincible a force of plain and perſpicuous reaſoning, as brought moſt men to their ſenſes, and

[f] Archbiſhop Tillotſon.

effectually ſilenced, or diſgraced, the reſt. They opened the grounds and obligations of morality ſo plainly, and ſet the Goſpel ſcheme of ſalvation *through faith, working by charity*, in ſo full and ſtriking a light, that injured *Virtue* recovered her antient honours, and yet was taught to acknowledge a juſt dependance on ſaving *Faith*.

Such was the triumph of enlightened reaſon and well-interpreted Scripture over *Antinomianiſm*: while yet many perverſe, and more miſtaken, hearers of thoſe days, were ready to revile their teachers, for dwelling ſo much and ſo long on theſe *old* topics, and would have gladly received other, and more *novel* inſtructions, at their hands.

2. But now the licence of that age, which followed the Reſtoration, was gone over, on the ſudden, into other extravagances, equally ruinous to the ſouls of men.

It had been made too clear to be denied, that moral righteouſneſs is of indiſpenſable obligation, ſo long as there is a

God to ſerve, or common ſenſe is allowed to have any hand in explaining his laws. To get rid then of ſo inconvenient a reſtraint, as genuine morality, many daring ſpirits of that time, ruſhed into *Atheiſm*; while the more timid, took refuge in *Popery*. For, to diſown a moral Governour, or to admit that any obſervances of ſuperſtition can releaſe men from the duty of obeying him, equally ſerves the purpoſe of thoſe, who reſolve to be as wicked as they dare, or as little virtuous as they can.

Theſe new evils, each of which, in its turn, the court itſelf had countenanced, or introduced, called for freſh remedies; and it was not long before they were adminiſtered, with effect. The ſame eminent perſons, who had vindicated moral virtue, now ſupported the cauſe of *piety*, and of *proteſtantiſm*, with equal ſucceſs. They overturned all the prophaneneſs, and all the philoſophy of *Atheiſm*, from its foundations: and, with reſiſtleſs argu-

ment, baffled the preſumption, and beat down the ſophiſtry, of the church of Rome. Yet theſe matchleſs ſervants of truth were charged by ſome, with indiſcretion in bringing to light all the horrors of atheiſtic impiety, though in order to expoſe them; and with prepoſterous zeal in directing all their efforts againſt Popery, though it wore, at that time, ſo malignant an aſpect on all our deareſt intereſts.

They were not, however, diverted by theſe clamours from purſuing their honeſt purpoſes: and we owe it to them, in a great meaſure, that theſe two ſyſtems of iniquity, I mean, Atheiſm, and Popery, are no longer in repute among us.

3. Still, the ſtate of the times may be altered, without being much improved. For, though few will avow direct Atheiſm, and not many, I hope, are proſelyted to Popery, yet the number of thoſe is not ſmall, who are but Proteſtants, in name; and ſcarce Deiſts, in reality. Many pro-

feſs, or ſecretly entertain, a diſbelief of all revealed Religion; and many more take unwarrantable liberties with the Chriſtian faith, though they pretend to reſpect it. At the ſame time, as extremes beget each each other, there are thoſe who ſeem relapſing into the old exploded fanaticiſm of the laſt age; from a falſe zeal, it may be, to counteract the ill impreſſion of thoſe other licentious principles.

Thus is the unbalanced mind of man always ſhifting from one exceſs into another; and rarely knows to ſuſtain itſelf in that juſt *mean*, which pure religion and right reaſon demand. Wonder not therefore, that our cares are ſtill ſuited to the exigencies of our hearers; and that we labour to ſupply them with that proviſion of ſacred truth, which they moſt want; that we ſtrive to excite in them awful ideas of God's moral government; are *inſtant in ſeaſon and out of ſeaſon* to aſſert the utility, the importance, the neceſſity of divine revelation; and are anxious to

maintain

maintain the prerogatives of Chriſtian faith, yet without depreciating the moral Law, or infringing the rights of natural reaſon: that we admoniſh you to think ſoberly, to inquire modeſtly, and to believe what the word of God expreſsly teaches, though ye do not, and can not, many times, comprehend the height and depth of divine wiſdom: that we remember, in ſhort, what is required of Stewards, who are appointed to diſpenſe the treaſures of Chriſtian knowledge, and to ſuperintend the *houſehold* of God.

I have now gone through the ſeveral topics, which our Lord's parable of the *Houſeholder* ſeemed naturally to ſuggeſt to me: not ſo much with a view to make our own apology (for if we do not our duty, we deſerve, and if we do, we want, none) as to ſet before you a juſt idea of our office and miniſtry, that ſo ye may judge rightly and equitably of us, for your own ſakes. For it is not indifferent to the *houſehold*, what opinion is entertained of

of the *Houſeholder*. Many will not ſuffer their wants to be *relieved* by him, or perhaps acknowledge they *have* any, if they do not conceive with ſome reſpect of his diſcretion, at leaſt, and good will.

And though, in the diſcharge of our duty to all, we may ſeem to neglect many, and may even diſſatisfy, nay offend ſome, yet, on reflection, you will ſee that we are not wanting to our truſt—if we always endeavour to diſpenſe *ſalutary* doctrines—if, eſpecially, we diſpenſe *ſuch* as the apparent and urgent neceſſities of men call for—and, above all, if we be ready to diſpenſe *all* our treaſures, *new* and *old*, when the more alarming diſtreſſes of the Chriſtian church require, on occaſion, our beſt attention and liberality.

To conclude: We reſpect your good opinion; nay, perhaps, are too ſolicitous to obtain it. But we would, or we ſhould, in the firſt place, pleaſe him, who hath called us to *ſerve*, and expects us to be *faithful*,

faithful, in all his house [g]. For we presume to be something more than Orators, or Philosophers, plausible and artificial discoursers, who have nothing in view but their own credit, and are eloquent or ingenious, that is, *vain*, by profession. We have a character to sustain of greater dignity, but less ostentation. *For* WE *preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord; and ourselves, your servants for Jesus sake* [h].

[g] Heb. iii. 2. [h] 2 Cor. iv. 5.

SERMON II.

Preached Nov. 8, 1767.

1 COR. X. 15.

I ſpeak as to wiſe men: judge ye what I ſay.

THOUGH St. Paul ſaid this to the Corinthians, on a particular occaſion, in reference to a ſingle argument he was then proſecuting, and poſſibly not without an intended ſarcaſm on thoſe whom he here qualifies with the name of *Wiſe men*, yet the words themſelves expreſs the Apoſtle's *own conſtant practice*; and what is more, they expreſs the *general*

ſpirit

ſpirit and genius of that Religion, which he was commiſſioned to teach.

For the Chriſtian Religion, divine as it is in its origin, ſublime in its precepts, and profound in its myſteries, yet condeſcends to apply itſelf to the rational faculties of mankind; and, ſecure in its own native truth and evidence, challenges the wiſe and learned to *judge* of its pretenſions.

So that we may regard the declaration of the text, as a ſtanding precept to the Miniſters of the word, *to ſpeak as to wiſe men*; and to the hearers of it, to uſe their beſt faculties, *in judging of what they ſay*.

Theſe then ſhall be the *two parts* of my diſcourſe upon it. *Each* will ſuggeſt ſome important reflexions to the perſons reſpectively concerned; to US, who preach the word, and to YOU, who hear it.

I. The Religion of Jeſus was deſigned for the inſtruction of all ſorts and degrees of men. Nay, it is even alledged as one mark of its divinity by Jeſus himſelf, that

not

not only the rich and wiſe, but the *poor* and ſimple, *have the Goſpel preached unto them*[i]. And from the different reception of it, at firſt, by theſe two ſets of men, we may perhaps ſee which of them deſerved it moſt. But be this as it will, the Chriſtian Religion was deſtined for the uſe of all mankind. Its ſaving truths are to be made known to all: yet with ſome difference in the *mode* of teaching them, according to the capacities of thoſe to whom they are addreſſed.

To PLAIN AND ILLITERATE MEN, who have no prejudices to counteract the virtue of God's word, and no pride of reaſon or ſcience to queſtion its authority, the true and proper way is, no doubt, to repreſent the great truths of the Goſpel, ſimply and clearly, accompanied with its more general and obvious proofs, and enforced upon them with all the earneſtneſs of exhortation. Theſe *proofs*, and this *exhorta-*

[i] Matt. xi. 15.

tion,

tion, carry ſuch light and force in them, as may be reaſonably expected to have an effect upon all men: yet to the WISE, who are prompted by their curioſity, or habits of inquiry, to *aſk a reaſon of the hope that is in us*[k], and who are qualified by their parts and ſtudies to *judge* of ſuch reaſon, we are inſtructed to addreſs a more elaborate *anſwer*, or apology.

The queſtion then will be, ON WHAT PRINCIPLES SUCH APOLOGY MUST BE FORMED? A queſtion the more important, becauſe the apologies of all times have been too generally conſtructed on falſe and pernicious principles; on *ſuch* as cannot ſupport, but rather tend to weaken and diſgrace, the very cauſe they would defend.

Such were the apologies, many times, of the *antient Chriſtians*, who would incorporate with the divine religion of Jeſus the vain doctrines of the Gentile philoſophy: and ſuch have been too often the

[k] 1 Pet. iii. 3.

more

more *modern apologies*, which debaſe the word of God, and corrupt it, with the dreams of our preſumptuous metaphyſics.

Our Religion has ſuffered much in both theſe ways: not, that reaſon or philoſophy of any kind, truly ſo called, can diſſerve the cauſe of a *divine* Religion; but that we reaſon and philoſophize *falſely*, or *perverſely*; that is, we apply falſhood to truth; or, we miſapply truth itſelf, in ſubjecting the incomprehenſible myſteries of our faith to the ſcrutiny and minute diſcuſſion of our beſt reaſon.

From theſe miſcarriages, we are admoniſhed what to *avoid:* the example of the Apoſtle Paul, who *ſpake as to wiſe men*, may inſtruct us in the right way of *proſecuting* the defence of the Goſpel.

From *him*, then, we learn to frame our anſwers and apologies to inquiſitive men, on the great eſtabliſhed truths of natural and revealed Religion: to aſſert the expediency of divine Revelation, from the acknowledged weakneſs and corruption of human

human nature, and from the moral attributes of the Deity; to illuſtrate the œconomy of God's diſpenſations to mankind by arguments taken from that œconomy itſelf; to reaſon with *reverence*[1] on the nature of thoſe diſpenſations, to ſhew what their general ſcope and purpoſe is, how perfect an agreement there is between them, and how divinely they are made to depend on each other.

In doing this, we ſhall find room for the exerciſe of our beſt and moſt improved reaſon: we ſhall diſcover much (and be able to diſplay it to others) of the harmony of the divine councils, as they are ſet before us in the inſpired volumes: and, though we may not penetrate all the depths and obſcurities of thoſe councils, yet, as in contemplating the WORKS of God, which we know but in part, we can demonſtrate his *eternal power and godhead*, ſo, in ſtudying his WORD, we ſhall ſee enough of his unſearchable wiſdom and

[1] 1 Pet. iii. 15.

goodneſs, *to put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh*, and to ſatisfy the inquiries of *wiſe*, men.

I ſay, *to ſatisfy the inquiries of wiſe men*: for *wiſe men* do not expect to have all difficulties in a divine ſyſtem cleared up, and every minute queſtion, which may be raiſed about it, anſwered (for *this*, God himſelf, the author and finiſher of it, can only perform, and much *leſs* than this is abundantly ſufficient for our purpoſe); but all they deſire is to ſee the ſeveral parts of it ſo far cleared up, and made conſiſtent with each other, and, upon the whole, to diſcover ſuch evident marks of a ſuperior wiſdom, power, and goodneſs in the frame and texture of it, as may convince them that it is truly divine, and worthy of the Supreme Mind to whom we aſcribe it.

When we ſpeak *thus* as to *wiſe men*, we do all that *wiſe men* can require of us: if others be ſtill unſatisfied, the fault is in themſelves, they are *curious*, but not wiſe.

I lay

I lay the greater ſtreſs on this mode of defending the Chriſtian Religion from *itſelf*, that is, by arguments taken from its own nature and eſſence, becauſe it ſhortens the diſpute with inquirers, and ſecures the honour of that Religion, we undertake to defend.

Firſt, *It ſhortens the diſpute with Inquirers*, by cutting off the conſideration of all thoſe objections which men raiſe out of their own imaginations. The defender of Chriſtianity is not concerned to obviate every idle fancy, that floats in the head of a viſionary objector. Men have not the making of their Religion, but muſt take it for ſuch as the Scriptures repreſent it to be. And if we defend it on the footing of ſuch repreſentation, we do all that can be reaſonably required of us. It is nothing to the purpoſe what men may imagine to themſelves concerning the marks and characters of a divine Revelation: it is enough, that there are *ſuch marks and characters* in the Religion of

Jeſus (whether more or fewer, whether the ſame or other, than we might previouſly have expected, is of no moment) as ſhew it, in all reaſonable conſtruction, to be *divine*. And thus our labour with Inquirers is much abridged, while all foreign and impertinent queſtions are rejected and laid aſide.

Next, This *mode* of defence *ſecures the honour of that religion, we undertake to ſupport*. For, if we fail in our endeavours to unfold ſome parts of the *Chriſtian ſyſtem*, we are but in the condition of thoſe, who would experimentally inveſtigate and clear up ſome difficulties in *the ſyſtem of nature*. Want of care, or diligence, or ſagacity, may ſubject both the Divine and the Philoſopher to ſome miſtakes: but either ſyſtem is the ſame ſtill, and lies open to the pains and attention of more ſucceſsful inquirers. Nobody concludes that the ſyſtem of nature is not divine, becauſe this or that Philoſopher has been led by haſty experiments to miſconceive of it.

And

And nobody *ſhould* conclude otherwiſe of the Chriſtian ſyſtem, though the Divine ſhould err as much in his ſcriptural comments and explications. Whereas, when we attempt to vindicate Chriſtianity on principles not clearly contained in the word of God, we act like thoſe who form phyſical theories on principles which have no foundation in *fact*. The conſequence is, That not only the labour of *each* is loſt, but the ſyſtem itſelf, which each would recommend, being haſtily taken for what it is unſkilfully repreſented to be, is vilified and diſgraced. For thus the *Chriſtian ſyſtem* has in fact been reviled by ſuch as have ſeen, or *would* only ſee it, through the falſe medium of Popiſh or Calviniſtical ideas: and thus the *ſyſtem of nature itſelf* hath, it is ſaid, been blaſphemed by ONE [m], who judged of it from the intricacies of a

[m] ALPHONSUS THE WISE—I go on the common ſuppoſition, that this Prince intended a reflection on the *ſyſtem of nature* itſelf; but, perhaps, his purpoſe was no more than, in a ſtrong way of expreſſion, (though it muſt be owned, no very decent one) to reprobate the *hypotheſis* [the *Ptolemaic*], which ſet that ſyſtem in ſo bad a light.

certain aſtronomical hypotheſis. The remedy for this evil, is, to ſolve ſcriptural difficulties by ſcriptural principles, and to account for natural appearances by experimental obſervations: and then, though the application of each may be miſtaken, the ſyſtem remains inviolate, and the honour both of God's WORD and WORKS is ſecured.

And let thus much ſuffice, at preſent, for the duty *of him, who ſpeaketh as to wiſe men.* Much more indeed is required to the *integrity*, and ſtill more, to the *ſucceſs*, of his defence. But he that *ſpeaketh, as the oracles of God*, that is, who defends a divine Religion on its own divine principles, does that which is moſt eſſential to his office; and eminently diſcharges the part of a *wiſe ſpeaker*, ſince he plans his *defence* in the beſt manner.

II. It now remains to conſider the other part of the text, which challenges *the wiſe men*, to whom the Apoſtle *ſpake*, to JUDGE of what he ſaid to them.

From

From the time, this *challenge* was given by the learned Apoſtle, there never have been wanting *wiſe men*, diſpoſed and forward to accept it. And thus far, all was well: for they had a right to exerciſe this office of *judging for themſelves*, if they were, indeed, capable of it. But have they conſidered, to what that *capacity* amounts? and that much more is required to make a good JUDGE, than a good SPEAKER?

Let us briefly *examine* then the pretenſions of thoſe, who have at all times been ſo ready to ſit in judgement on the Advocates for Religion, by the known qualities of a capable Judge: which, I think, are *Knowledge*, *Patience*, *Impartiality*, *Integrity*, under which laſt name I include *Courage*.

1. The firſt requiſite in a Judge, is a competent *knowledge* in the ſubject of which he judges, without which his other qualities, how reſpectable ſoever, are rendered uſeleſs. Nor is this knowledge,

in the preſent caſe, inconſiderable. For, to ſay nothing of *ſacred and prophane Antiquity*, to ſay nothing of the *Sciences*, and above all, the ſcience of *Ethics*, in its largeſt extent, the *Judge* of religious controverſy muſt be well verſed, becauſe the *Advocate* is required to be *ſupremely* ſo, in the great *principles and doctrines* of natural and revealed Religion. To decide on the *merits of Chriſtianity*, without this knowledge, would be as abſurd, as to decide on *the merits of the Engliſh juriſprudence*, without an acquaintance with the *common law*, and the *Statute-book*.

2. The next quality, required in a Judge, is *Patience*, or a deliberate unwearied attention to the arguments and repreſentations of the Advocate, pleading before him. This attention is more eſpecially expected, when the ſubject in debate is important, when it is, beſides, intricate, and when the Advocate is able.

But

But theſe circumſtances all concur, in the caſe before us. If the queſtion concerning the truth and authority of Revelation be a cauſe of any moment at all, it is confeſſedly of the greateſt: Again, if the ſcheme of Revelation *be*, as it pretends to be, *divine*, it muſt require the beſt application of our beſt faculties to comprehend it; and, laſtly, as the ableſt men of all times, of every profeſſion and denomination, have appeared in its defence, ſuch advocates may demand to be heared with all poſſible attention. For the Judge of ſuch a cauſe, then, to confide in his own firſt thoughts, to liſten negligently and impatiently, and to precipitate his determination, muſt be altogether unworthy the character he aſſumes.

3. It is expected of a Judge that he be ſtrictly *impartial*; that he come to the trial of a cauſe without any previous bias on his mind, or any paſſionate and prevailing prejudices, in regard either to perſons or things, which may indiſpoſe him

to

to ſee the truth, or to reſpect it. And this turn of mind, ſo conducive to a right determination in all caſes, is the more neceſſary here, where ſo many ſecret prejudices are apt, without great care, to ſteal in and corrupt the judgement.

4. The laſt quality, which men require in a Judge, is, an inflexible *Integrity*; ſuch as may infuſe the virtue and the courage to give his judgement according to his impartial ſenſe of things, without any regard to the conſequences, in which it may involve him. This conſtancy of mind may be put to no eaſy trial in the preſent caſe; when the Judge's determination may perhaps intereſt his whole future conduct; and when the cenſure, the ſcorn, and the diſpleaſure of numbers, and poſſibly of thoſe whom he has hitherto moſt conſidered and eſteemed, may be incurred by ſuch determination.

THESE are the great eſſential qualities which we look for in a JUDGE, and which cannot

cannot be diſpenſed with in a Judge of *Religion*. How far all, or any of theſe qualities are to be found in thoſe, who take to themſelves this office, I have neither time, nor inclination, to conſider. For my purpoſe is not to diſparage thoſe who have exerciſed the right of judging for themſelves in the great affair of Religion, nor to diſcourage any man from doing himſelf this juſtice: but ſimply to repreſent the difficulties, that lie in our way, and the qualifications we muſt poſſeſs, if we would *judge a righteous judgement*.

I leave it to yourſelves, therefore, to apply theſe obſervations, as ye think fit. Ye will conclude, however, that to *judge* of the pretenſions of your religion is no ſuch eaſy taſk, as that any man, without *parts*, without *knowledge*, without *induſtry*, and without *virtue*, may preſume to undertake it.

The ſum of all I have ſaid is, then, this. The Apoſtle, when he became an Advo-

cate for the Goſpel, condeſcended *to ſpeak*, and it muſt therefore be more eſpecially the duty of its uninſpired advocates to *ſpeak, as to wiſe men*; that is, to employ in its defence all the powers of reaſon and wiſdom, of which they are capable. But it will be remembered, too, that much, nay *more*, is required of the JUDGES of it; and that they muſt approve themſelves, not only *wiſe*, but, in every *moral* ſenſe, excellent men, before they are qualified to paſs a final judgement on what ſuch Advocates have to *ſay* on ſo momentous a cauſe, as that of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

SERMON III.

Preached May 17, 1767.

ROM. ii. 14, 15.

When the Gentiles, which have not the Law, DO *by Nature the things contained in the Law, theſe, having not the Law, are a Law unto themſelves: which ſhew the work of the Law written in their hearts, their* CONSCIENCE *alſo bearing witneſs, and their thoughts in the mean while* ACCUSING *or elſe* EXCUSING *one another.*

THE ſcope of this chapter being to aſſert, that the Gentile, as well as Jew, had a right to be admitted into the Chriſtian church, and that he was equally entitled to ſhare in the bleſſings of it, the Apoſtle grounds his argument upon this

Principle, " That, in the final judgement, " there would be no reſpect of perſons " with God; but that Gentiles, as well " as Jews, would be recompenſed in that " day, if not in the ſame degree, yet by " the ſame rule of proportion, that is, " according to their works."

Whence it would follow, that, if this equal meaſure was to be dealt to *both*, in the *future judgement*, it could not ſeem ſtrange if *both* were to be admitted to the *preſent benefits and privileges* of the Goſpel.

But, to keep off a concluſion ſo uneaſy to his inveterate prejudices, the Jew would object to this reaſoning, " That the Apo- " ſtle's aſſumption muſt be falſe; for that " as God had given the Heathens no " Law, they were not accountable to him: " that, as there could be no room for " Puniſhment, where no Law forbade, ſo " there could be no claim to Reward, " where no Law enjoyned: and conſe- " quently, that the Heathen world, being

" left

" left without Law, had no concern in a " future recompence, at all."

This ſuggeſtion the Apoſtle obviates, by ſhewing the inconſequence of it. His anſwer is to this effect. You, ſays he, conclude, that the Heathens are not accountable, becauſe they have no Law. But it no way follows, becauſe they had no Law extraordinarily revealed to them from heaven, that therefore the Heathens had no Law, or Rule of life, at all. For theſe, *having no* ſuch *Law*, were *a Law unto themſelves*; that is, their natural reaſon and underſtanding, was their Law.

And, for the real exiſtence of ſuch natural Law, he appeals to the virtuous ACTIONS of ſome Heathens, *who* DO *by nature the things contained in the Law*; who, beſides, as it follows in the next verſe, *ſhew the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conſciences alſo bearing witneſs, and their thoughts in the mean while accuſing or elſe excuſing one another*. In which laſt words are contained two additional

ditional arguments in proof of the ſame point; the *firſt*, taken from their own CONSCIOUSNESS of ſuch a Law; and the *ſecond, from their reaſonings between one another*, ACCUSING *or elſe* EXCUSING: for this is the ſtrict ſenſe and literal conſtruction of thoſe words in the original, which we improperly tranſlate—*their thoughts in the mean while accuſing or elſe excuſing one another* [n].

So that in the verſes of the Text we have a PROPOSITION aſſerted; and THREE diſtinct arguments brought in proof of it. The propoſition is, *that the Heathen are a Law unto themſelves*, or, as it is otherwiſe expreſſed, *have a Law written in their hearts.* The arguments in proof of it are 1. The virtuous lives of ſome heathen, *doing by nature the work of the Law:*

[n] —μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων, ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων. See the Paraphraſe and Comment on this text by Mr. Taylor of Norwich, to whom I acknowledge myſelf indebted for the idea which governs the general method of this diſcourſe.

2. The

2. The force of *conſcience*, teſtifying their knowledge of ſuch Law: and 3. laſtly, their *private and judicial reaſonings* among themſelves, referring to the confeſſed authority of it.

In conformity to this method of the Apoſtle, my buſineſs will be to open and explain the ſeveral arguments in the order, in which they lie; and to confirm, by that means, the truth of his general Propoſition, *That there is a natural Law, or Rule of moral action, written in the hearts of men.*

I. The argument from the virtues of the heathen world, in proof of a Law of nature, *written in the hearts of men*, will ſeem ſtrange to ſome, who may object, "That, if the appeal be to *action*, it may with greater reaſon be inferred, there was not any ſuch Law; ſince the crimes and vices of the heathen world, as terribly ſet forth by St. Paul himſelf in the preceding chapter, were far more notorious, than its Virtues. So that if there be any force

in St. Paul's appeal to the virtuous lives of ſome heathen, as evincing a Law, *written in their hearts*, becauſe their practice was governed by it; the like appeal to the vicious lives of many more heathen, ſhould ſeem with ſtill more force to prove the non-exiſtence of ſuch Law, in as much as it did *not* govern their practice." But the anſwer is obvious. For a Law may be in part, or even totally, violated by perſons under a full conviction of its exiſtence and obligation: whereas it is hard to imagine, that any number of men, of different times, in diſtant places, and under different circumſtances of age, temper, and education, ſhould exhibit in their lives the ſame tenour of action, without the guidance of ſome fixed and common Rule.

This then being obſerved, let us turn our eyes upon the heathen world; on that part, more eſpecially, which is beſt known to us from the authentic monuments of Greek and Roman ſtory. For *bad* as that

world

world was, it cannot be denied to have furniſhed many inſtances of extraordinary virtue. We find there *juſtice*, *temperance*, *fortitude*, and all thoſe virtues, which their own Moraliſts called *Offices*, and which the ſacred page has dignified with the name of *Graces*, exhibited in their faireſt forms, and emulating, as it were, even Chriſtian perfection [o].

But it will be ſaid of *both* theſe people, what was long ſince objected by one of them to the other, that their actions were not ſo illuſtrious, as is pretended; that we take the accounts of them from their own intereſted relaters, to whoſe vanity or genius we are rather to impute the fine portraits, they have given us, of pagan virtue, then to real fact and the undiſguiſed truth of things [p].

Be this allowed. Still there will be ground enough to enforce the Apoſtle's concluſion. For whence, if not from the

[o] *Nat. Deor.* l. ii. c. 66.

[p] Salluſt.

ſource, to which he points, could be derived thoſe numerous correſponding inſtances, though of faint, unfiniſhed Virtue? how, but by *nature*, *did the heathen*, in any degree, *the things of the Law?* and whence, but the traces of that conduct in the pagan world, which the Law itſelf preſcribed as *virtuous?*

Or, were the evidence from *facts* ever ſo ſuſpicious, whence thoſe admired portraits and pictures themſelves? or, by what accountable means has it come to paſs that their hiſtorians and panegyriſts have been able to feign ſo ſucceſsfully? In truth, had the pagan world afforded no *one* inſtance of a virtuous people, I had almoſt ſaid, no *one* inſtance of a virtuous character, yet would the projected form of ſuch a people, by one hand [q], and the delineation of ſuch a character, by another [r], have been a certain evidence of ſome Rule of life and manners, *written*

[q] Plato's *Republic.*

[r] Xenophon's *Inſt. of Cyrus.*

in

in the heart, if not tranſcribed into practice; influencing the judgement to approve, if not the will to obey it. But this conſideration, perhaps, comes more naturally under the ſecond head of the Apoſtle's reaſoning, which is drawn,

II. *From the force of conſcience in the heathen world.*

To perceive the force of this argument, it muſt be remembered, That, by conſcience, is only meant *a man's judgement concerning the quality of his own actions*; which judgement, however come at, whether by uſe, or inſtitution, by reaſon, or inſtinct, equally ſuppoſes ſome *Law*, or Rule of conduct, by which the nature of each action is tried, and by which its worth is eſtimated. Now it is of no moment in the preſent caſe, from whichſoever of theſe ſources that judgement is *immediately* drawn, ſince it cannot but be, that ſome fixed principle, common to human nature, and of equal extent with it, muſt have originally given birth to ſuch

judgement. For if *uſe*, or *inſtitution* be conſidered as the probable ſource of it, the queſtion will recur, whence that Uſe, or what the original of that Inſtitution? A queſtion, which cannot be reſolved, unleſs we conceive ſome *natural law*, as working at the root, and branching out, as it were, into *Uſe*, or *Inſtitution*.

Nor is it ſufficient to ſay, *That the manners of different people are, and have been, widely different; and that conſcience, or ſelf-judgement, according as different notions or practices prevail, condemns, or approves the very ſame action.* Without doubt, it does. But the conſequence is, not, as ſome ſceptical writers have imagined, that there is no common principle of nature, diſtinguiſhing between right and wrong, or that moral action is of abſolute indifference; but that men are, and have been, careleſs and corrupt; that they have either not uſed the light of nature, or have ſome way abuſed it. For it holds of *Sentiment*, as of *Action*, that, though the agree-

agreement of numbers in all times and places be a good argument *for* the exiſtence of ſome common rule of right, as effecting ſuch agreement (becauſe otherwiſe no tolerable account can be given of it); yet the diſagreement even of greater numbers is no proof *againſt* the exiſtence of ſuch Rule, as we can, without that ſuppoſition, give a ſatisfactory account *of* that diſagreement. I call it *a ſatisfactory account*; for it comes from St. Paul himſelf, who has taken care to obviate this plauſible objection. If it be ſaid then, *That the Heathen approved bad, and condemned good actions*, we own they ſometimes did, but anſwer with the Apoſtle, That, in ſuch caſes, *they became vain in their imaginations*, and that *their fooliſh heart was darkened*; that, as they *did not ſearch to retain God in their knowledge*, did not exert their faculties to acquire or preſerve a right ſenſe of God's nature and will, *he gave them up to an unſearching mind*, ſuffered them to darken and put out

the light of their underſtandings, and ſo to *do* [and to *approve*] *things that were not convenient*[s].

This being the true account of the diverſity of human judgement, ſuch diverſity only proves that the light of nature has been miſuſed, not, that it was never given. Whereas, on the other hand, if the Heathen world can ſhew us, in general, a conformity of judgement in moral matters, under their ſtate of nature, with that of the world, under the light of Revelation, what follows, but that they, *having not the Law, ſhew the work of the Law, written in their hearts?*

But now that there was, in fact, ſuch a conformity, we conclude from *the accounts of thoſe times, the ſenſe of writers, and the confeſſions of perſons themſelves:* the only means, by which a point of this nature can be eſtabliſhed. The pagan hiſtorians and moraliſts are full of ſuch leſſons, as we now profit by: and even their

[s] Rom. ch. i. ver. 28—32.—ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα —συνευδοκοῦσι τοῖς πράσσουσι.

poets,

poets, on the ſtage itſelf (where *common* nature is drawn for the ſake of *common* inſtruction) repreſent their characters, for the moſt part, as *good* or *bad*, according to the ideas we ſhould now entertain of them. In writers of all ſorts, we find abundant evidence of this truth. Numberleſs perſons are upon record, who confeſs, in their own caſes, and atteſt, this uniform power of conſcience. They applaud themſelves for, what *we* ſhould call, *a well-ſpent life*, and they condemn themſelves for, what *we* call, *a bad one*. To touch on a topic ſo known as this, is, in effect, to exhauſt it. I ſhall then but juſt point to the great [x] *Roman patriot* exulting in the memory of his *Virtues*: and to the [y] *Roman governour*, ſo famous in ſacred writ, whom the preaching of Paul, in concurrence with his own heart, made tremble for his *Vices*.

III. But if men did not feel the power of conſcience operating within themſelves,

[x] Cicero, paſſim.

[y] Felix, Acts xxiv. 25.

and declaring *a Law written in their hearts*, yet their daily conduct towards each other in the civil concerns of life, would evidently proclaim it. For obſerve how ſtudious men are to repel an injurious imputation, faſtened on a friend: and ſtill more, how they labour to aſſert their own innocence. What pains do we ſee taken, to overthrow a *falſe* evidence, and what colours of art do we ſee employed to palliate or diſguiſe a *true* one? No man needs be told that this is the conſtant practice of Chriſtians: and *did not the Heathens the ſame?* Here then is a freſh proof of the point in queſtion; an argument of familiar evidence ariſing from the tranſactions of common life. For, in the altercations with each other, in reference to *right* and *wrong*, there is manifeſtly ſuppoſed ſome prior Law of univerſal reaſon, to which the appeal on both ſides is directed, and by which the deciſion is finally to be made. And this, as the Apoſtle's argument ſuggeſts, whichever of the contending

ing parties be in the *wrong*. For the charging another with *wrong* conduct, equally implies a Rule, determining my judgement of moral action; as the defending myſelf or others from ſuch a charge, evinces my ſenſe of it. Thus, whether I *accuſe*, or *anſwer for myſelf*, either way, I ſhew *a Law written in my heart*; whence I eſtimate the *right* or *wrong* of the ſuppoſed queſtion. Thus much might be inferred from the ordinary topics of *converſation*: but the caſe is ſtill clearer, when they come to be debated *in courts of Juſtice*. More eſpecially, therefore, the ſtruggles and contentions of the *Bar* (for the terms, employed in the text, being *forenſic*, direct us chiefly to that interpretation), a ſeries of civil and judiciary pleadings, ſuch as have been preſerved to us, from heathen times, in the writings of a Demoſthenes, or Cicero, are a ſtanding, unanſwerable argument for the exiſtence of a *Rule of Right*, or *Law of natural reaſon*. For how ſhould theſe debates be car-

ried on without a Rule, to which the advocates of either party refer? or how ſhould theſe judicial differences be compoſed, without a common Law, to arbitrate between them? And what though the Law, referred to, be a *written inſtitute*: It was firſt *written in the heart*, before legiſlators tranſcribed it on braſs, or paper.

You ſee then, the ſum of the Apoſtle's reaſoning ſtands thus. The Heathens, who had no revealed Law, DID *by nature, the things of the Law*: their JUDGEMENT, too, of their own actions, conformed to the judgement of *the Law*: and, laſtly, their DEBATES with one another, whether public or private, concerning *right* and *wrong*, evidenced their ſenſe of ſome Law, which *Nature* had preſcribed to them.

And in this fine chain of argument, we may obſerve the peculiar art, by which it is conducted, and the advantage, reſulting from ſuch conduct to the main concluſion. For if the argument from WORKS, ſhould ſeem of leſs weight (as it poſſibly

poſſibly might, after the Apoſtle's own charge upon the heathen world, and in that age of heathen corruption) yet the evidence ariſing from CONSCIENCE, which was an appeal to every man's own breaſt, could hardly be reſiſted: or, if conſcience could be laid aſleep (as it might be by vice and ill habits), it was impoſſible they could deny the DEBATES among themſelves, or not ſee the inference that muſt needs be drawn from them.

It may, further, ſeem to have been with ſome propriety that the ſacred reaſoner employed theſe topics of argument, in an addreſs to ROMANS: who could not but feel the weight of them the more, as well knowing the antient VIRTUE of their country; as knowing too, that the Roman people had been famous for their nice ſenſe of right and wrong, or, in other words, a moral CONSCIENCE; and that, as having been a free people, they had been always accuſtomed to DEBATES about moral action, public and private.

Such

Such is the force, and ſuch the elegant diſpoſition and addreſs, of the Apoſtle's reaſoning. The concluſion follows irreſiſtibly, *That there is a Law written in our hearts, or that, beſides a Revealed Law, there is a Law of natural Reaſon.*

That this concluſion is not injurious to *revealed Law*, but indeed moſt friendly and propitious to it; that, in particular, it no way derogates from the honour of the *Chriſtian Law*, nor can ſerve in any degree to leſſen the value, or ſuperſede the uſe and neceſſity of it, I ſhall attempt to ſhew in another diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON IV.

Preached May 24, 1767.

GAL. iii. 19.

Wherefore then ſerveth the Law?

WHEN the Apoſtle Paul had proved, in his Epiſtle to the [a] Romans, that if the *uncircumciſion kept the righteouſneſs of the Law, his uncircumciſion would be accounted for circumciſion*; that is, if the Gentile obſerved the *moral law*, which was his proper rule of life, he would be accepted of God, as well as the Jew, who obſerved the *Moſaic Law*; this generous reaſoning gave offence, and he was preſently aſked, WHAT ADVANTAGE THEN HATH THE JEW [b]?

[a] Ch. ii. [b] Ch. iii. 1.

In like manner, when the ſame Apoſtle had been contending, in his Epiſtle to the Galatians, that *the inheritance was not of the Law, but of Promiſe* [c]; that is, that all men, the Gentiles as well as the Jews, were entitled to the bleſſings of the Chriſtian covenant, in virtue of God's *promiſe* to Abraham—*that in his ſeed all the nations of the earth ſhall be bleſſed*—and not the Jews excluſively, in virtue of the *Moſaic Law*, given to them only; the ſame ſpirit diſcovers itſelf, as before, and he is again interrogated by his captious diſciples, WHEREFORE THEN SERVETH THE LAW? if the Gentiles may be juſtified *through faith in Chriſt*, and ſo inherit the promiſe made to Abraham, as well as the Jews, to what purpoſe was the Jewiſh Law then given?

And to theſe queſtions, how unreaſonable ſoever, the learned Apoſtle has himſelf condeſcended to give an anſwer.

[c] Ch. iii.

Now

Now, the ſame perverſeneſs, which gave birth to theſe Jewiſh prejudices, ſeems to have operated in ſome Chriſtians; who, on being told, and even by St. Paul himſelf, of *a Law of Nature*, by which the Heathen were required to govern their lives, and by the obſervance of which, without their knowledge of any revealed Law, they would be finally accepted, have been forward in their turn, to aſk, WHEREFORE THEN SERVETH THE LAW? Or, if there be a *natural Law*, according to which the very Heathen will be judged, and may be rewarded, what are the boaſted privileges of *Revealed Law*, and, in particular, the revealed Law *of the Goſpel?*

Now to this queſtion (having, in my laſt diſcourſe, aſſerted the propoſition, which gives occaſion to it) I ſhall reply, in the beſt manner I can, by ſhewing,

I. That the ſuppoſition of a *natural moral Law* is even neceſſary to the ſupport of REVELATION: And

II. That this ſuppoſition no way derogates from the honour of the GOSPEL.

I. *That a natural moral Law is required to ſupport the authority of Revelation*, I conclude, not merely, *becauſe* this ſuppoſition is actually made in ſacred Scripture, *becauſe* the ſacred writers argue expreſſly from it, and everywhere refer to it, but principally and chiefly, *becauſe*, without admitting this prior Law of nature, we cannot judge of any pretended Revelation, whether it be divine or no. For, if there be no ſuch moral Law, previouſly given, which our hearts and conſciences approve, and to which our common nature aſſents, we can never ſee the fitneſs of any means, as conducive to *a moral end*; we can entertain no juſt and clear notions of *moral action*, properly ſo called; and, conſequently, we can have no ideas of what are called *the moral attributes* of God. Now, in this ſtate of ignorance and uncertainty, how ſhall any man go about to prove to us the divinity of any Revelation, or through

through what medium can its truth or authenticity be eſtabliſhed? We have no Rule, no principles, by which to judge of the Law, pretending to come from God: we cannot tell, whether it be worthy of him, or not: we do not ſo much as know, what *worth* or *goodneſs* is, either in ourſelves, or in the Deity. Thus all *internal arguments* for the excellence of any Religion are at once cut off: and yet till, from ſuch conſiderations, we find that a Religion *may* come from God, we cannot reaſonably conclude, on any evidence, that it *does* come from him. The Religion of Mahomet may, for any thing we can tell, if there be no moral Law for us to judge by, be as worthy of God, as that of Jeſus. Nor will any *external arguments*, even the moſt unqueſtioned miracles, of themſelves, be ſufficient to confirm its pretenſions. For how ſhall we know, that theſe miracles are from God, unleſs we underſtand what his attributes are, and whether

the occaſion, for which they are wrought, be ſuch as is conſiſtent with them?

So that thoſe zealous perſons, who think they do honour to the revealed will of God, by denying him to have given a prior natural Law, do, indeed, defeat their own purpoſe, and put it out of their power to judge of any Revelation whatſoever. There is, then, a Law of Reaſon, *written in the heart*, by which *every* Religion, claiming to be divine, muſt be tried, or we have no ground to ſtand upon in our endeavours to ſupport the credit and divinity of *any* Religion.

What is, then, ſo neceſſary to the ſupport of *Revelation*, in general, cannot, we may be ſure,

II. *Any way derogate from the honour of the Chriſtian Revelation*, in particular.

But, to put this matter out of all doubt, I ſhall diſtinctly ſhew, that the ſuppoſition of a *natural moral Law* neither diſcredits the USE, nor tends, in the leaſt, to ſuperſede the NECESSITY, of the Goſpel.

And

And 1. IT DOES NOT DISCREDIT ITS USE.

For, what, if all men be endowed with thoſe faculties, which, if properly employed, may inſtruct us in the knowledge of God and ourſelves, and of the duties we, reſpectively, owe to Him and to each other? Is it nothing, that this knowledge is rendered more eaſy and familiar to us by the lights of the Goſpel? Is it nothing, that thoſe laws, which men of thought and reflection may deduce for themſelves from principles of natural reaſon, are openly declared to all; that they are confirmed, illuſtrated, and enforced by expreſs revelation? Is it of no moment, that the plaineſt and buſieſt men are as fully inſtructed in their duty, as men of ſcience and leiſure, the ſimpleſt as well as the wiſeſt, the mechanic and the ſage, the ruſtic and philoſopher? Is it of no uſe, that men are kept ſteady in their knowledge and obſervance of the law of nature, by this pole-ſtar of revelation?

that they are ſecured from error and miſtake, from the effects of their own haſte, or negligence, or infirmity, from the illuſions of cuſtom or ill example, from the falſe lights of fanaticiſm or ſuperſtition, and from the perverſeneſs of their own reaſonings? Look into the hiſtory of mankind, and ſee what horrid idolatries have overſpread the world in ſpite of what *Nature* teaches concerning God; and what portentous immoralities have prevailed in the wiſeſt nations, in defiance, nay, *what is worſe*, under the countenance and ſanction, of what was deemed *natural Reaſon*.

Add to all this, that the moral duties, we thus eaſily and certainly know, and without any danger of miſtake or corruption, by means of the evangelical Law, are enjoined by the higheſt authority; are ſet off by the brighteſt examples; are recommended to us by new arguments and conſiderations; are preſſed upon us by the moſt engaging motives, higher and more important than nature could ſug-

geſt

geſt to us; and laſtly, are ſublimed and perfected by the moſt conſummate reaſon.

Still, we are not got to the end of our account. Conſider, further, our natural weakneſs, ſtrengthened and aſſiſted by the influences of divine Grace; the doubts and miſgivings of Nature, in the momentous points of repentance and forgiveneſs of ſin, cleared; the true end and deſtination of moral agents, diſcovered; a future judgement, aſcertained; and the hopes of endleſs unſpeakable glory, which nature could at moſt but deſire, and had no reaſon (unleſs that deſire be, itſelf, a reaſon) to expect, unveiled and fully confirmed to us.

This, and ſtill more, is but a faint ſketch of the advantages, which, even in point of morals, we derive from Revealed Law. Go now, then, and ſay, that the light of nature, ſet up in your own hearts, obſcures the glory, or *diſcredits the uſe*, of the everlaſting Goſpel!

2. But it is a low, degrading, and unjuſt idea of the *Goſpel*, to regard it only, as a new code of morals, though more compleat in itſelf, more ſolemnly enacted, and more efficaciouſly enforced, than the prior one of *nature*. Were the *uſe* of each the ſame, the honour of the Chriſtian revelation would not be impaired, becauſe its NECESSITY IS NOT SUPERSEDED.

For Chriſtianity, rightly underſtood, is ſomething vaſtly above what Reaſon could diſcover or procure for us. It confirms, incidentally, the law of nature, and appeals to it; it harmonizes, throughout, with that and every other prior revelation of God's will, as it could not but do, if it were indeed derived from the ſame eternal ſource of light and truth. But, for all that, it is no more a ſimple *re-publication* of the natural, than of any other divine Law. It is a new and diſtinct revelation, that perfects and completes all the reſt. It is the conſummation of one great providential ſcheme, planned before the

the ages, and fully executed in due time, for the redemption of mankind from ſin and death, through the mercies of God in Chriſt Jeſus.

Now, in this view, which is that which Chriſtianity exhibits of its own purpoſe, the ſcheme of the Goſpel is not only of the moſt tranſcendant *uſe*, as it confirms, elucidates, and enforces the moral Law, but of the moſt ABSOLUTE NECESSITY: I ſay, *of the moſt abſolute neceſſity*; in reference to the divine wiſdom, and to the condition of mankind, both which, without doubt, if we could penetrate ſo far, required this peculiar interpoſition of heaven, on principles of the higheſt reaſon, as well as goodneſs. But the *neceſſity* is apparent even to us, on the grounds of this very Revelation. For its declared purpoſe was to reſcue all men from the power of *Death*, and to beſtow upon them immortal *life* in happineſs. But, now, the ſame Goſpel, that tells us this, tells us, withall, that, *as in Adam all men died*,

ſo

ſo in CHRIST, only, *ſhall all men be made alive*; and that, *without* the *blood* of CHRIST, *there could be no remiſſion* of the forfeiture incurred by the tranſgreſſion of Adam. You ſee, then, that, to argue upon Goſpel-principles (and the fair inquirer can argue upon no other) the Chriſtian diſpenſation was *neceſſary* to fulfill the purpoſes of God to man, and to effect that which the divine councils had decreed in relation to him.

The conſequence is, that, though we admit a Law of nature, and even ſuppoſe that Law to have been a ſufficient guide in *morals*, yet the honour of Chriſtianity is fully ſecured, for that its *neceſſity* is clearly evinced, and could not be *ſuperſeded* by that Law, which had not *the promiſe of eternal life*, and could not have it; ſuch promiſe being reſerved to manifeſt and illuſtrate the grace of God, through the Goſpel.

Reaſon may be aſtoniſhed at this repreſentation of things, but finds nothing to oppoſe

oppoſe to it. It looks up, in ſilent adoration, to that ſupreme incomprehenſible Power, which wills that which is beſt, and orders all things with the moſt perfect reaſon.

Nor let it be any objection, that the Law of Nature points to ſome juſt recompence of moral agents, independently of the Chriſtian Law. Without doubt, it does; and, if the Goſpel had never been vouchſafed to man, the Judge of all the world would have done that which was fit and right. But can reaſon, can our own hearts, aſſure us, that the beſt of us could ſtand the ſcrutiny of ſtrict juſtice, or be entitled to any recompence of *reward?* Or, if our preſumption anſwer this queſtion in our favour, have we the leaſt pretence to that unſpeakable reward, ſolely made known and promiſed in the Goſpel, of *everlaſting life?* Or, if mere Heathens, who are to be judged by their own Law, may be admitted to an eternal inheritance of life and glory, are we

we ſure that this mercy (for mercy it is, and cannot be of right) is not vouchſafed to them, through Chriſt, though they may have been ignorant of Him? or rather, are we not certain that it muſt be ſo, ſince *eternal life*, on whomſoever beſtowed, *is the gift of God through Chriſt*[d]?

What effect the Goſpel-ſcheme of Redemption through Chriſt may have on thoſe who lived of old under the Law of nature or any other Law, or who ſince the coming of Chriſt have continued in the ſame circumſtances, it becomes us with great caution to inquire, becauſe the Scriptures have not explicitly and fully inſtructed us in that matter. But, from certain expreſſions, occaſionally dropped by the ſacred writers, ſuch as —*that Chriſt died for all*[e]; *that God was in Chriſt reconciling the world to himſelf*[f]—*that Chriſt is the propitiation for our ſins, and not for*

[d] Rom. vi. 23.
[e] 2 Cor. v. 15.
[f] 2 Cor. v. 19.

ours

ours only, but alſo for the ſins of the whole world[g]; from theſe, and other paſſages of the like nature, we are authorized to conclude, that the benefits of Chriſt's death do extend, in *ſome ſenſe*, to all men: that, though each will be judged by the Law he lived under, the iſſue of that judgement will reſpect the death of Chriſt: that their living again to receive the recompence of the deeds done in the body, however Nature might ſuggeſt this event, is, in fact, brought about through *the redemption that is in Chriſt*[h]: and that whatever recompence they receive beyond what in ſtrict juſtice is due unto them, is to be placed entirely and ſingly to his account. Such inferences, as theſe, are apparently reaſonable, and juſt: nor do they prejudice, in any degree, the hope and faith of a Chriſtian: others may have an intereſt in the blood of the croſs; but our privilege is to *know*, that we have it.

[g] 1 John ii. 2.
[h] Rom. iii. 24.

The

The advantages flowing from this knowledge, are infinite. And therefore good reaſon there is to hold, with the Apoſtle, that, although *the living God be the Saviour of all men*, yet is he *ſpecially ſo of thoſe that believe* [i].

On the whole, then, if men will be putting ſuch a queſtion to us, as that of the text, *Wherefore then ſerveth the Law?* To what end was the *Chriſtian Law* given, if there be a prior Law of Nature to which men are reſponſible, and by which they will be judged? We are now prepared to give them a ſatisfactory anſwer.

We ſay then, *firſt*, that the *Chriſtian Law*, to whatever ends *it ſerveth*, preſuppoſes the exiſtence of a *prior natural Law*, by which its pretenſions muſt be tried and examined, and which is therefore neceſſary to the ſupport of the *Chriſtian*, as of any other *Revealed* Law.

But, *ſecondly*, and more directly, we anſwer, that the ſuppoſition of ſuch natural

[i] 1 Tim. iv. 10.

Law

Law no way diminiſhes *the honour of the Chriſtian Law*; for that it ſerves to many the moſt important MORAL USES, over and above thoſe to which the Law of nature ſerves; and that, further, it is of the moſt abſolute NECESSITY to the accompliſhment of its own great purpoſe, *the redemption of the world*, which the Law of nature could not effect, and which the divine wiſdom ordained ſhould only be effected through Chriſt Jeſus. *Laſtly*, we reply, that the benefits of the Goſpel-inſtitution may, muſt, in ſome meaſure, extend to all the ſons of Adam, as well as to thoſe who are more eſpecially enlightened by the Chriſtian faith: that all mankind have an intereſt in the Goſpel, though we Chriſtians are firſt and principally indebted to it.

To conclude, whatever Law, whether we term it of *nature*, or *revelation*, has been given to us, we ſhould receive with all thankfulneſs and reverence. But, more eſpecially, ſhould we adore the riches of God's

God's grace in the revealed Law of the Goſpel, and in the ſingular unſpeakable mercies conveyed by it. Far from envying the Heathen world the advantages they receive from the law of Reaſon, under which they live, let us bleſs God for his impartial over-flowing goodneſs to all men; let us even rejoice for the benefits treaſured up for them in a merciful diſpenſation, of which, at preſent, they unhappily know nothing; and let us only acknowledge, with eſpecial gratitude, the higher bleſſings vouchſafed to us, who are called to *ſerve God in the Goſpel of his Son* [k].

[k] Rom. i. 9.

SER-

SERMON V.

Preached May 1, 1768.

HEB. ii. 3.

How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great Salvation?

THE Religion of Nature, is the Law of God, ſpeaking by the voice of Reaſon: the Religion of the Goſpel, is the Law of God, ſpeaking by the Revelation of Jeſus. Each of theſe Laws is deſervedly called, *a great Salvation:* the *former*, as the baſis of all true Religion; the *latter*, as the conſummation of all God's religious diſpenſations to mankind.

Concerning the different purpoſe and genius of theſe Laws, I ſhall not now ſpeak; at leaſt, no farther, than is neceſ-

ſary to enforce the Apoſtle's pathetic queſtion, *How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great Salvation*; if we neglect to obſerve theſe Laws, reſpectively given to promote man's trueſt happineſs.

The world abounds in commentaries on the Law of Nature, and on the Law of Chriſtianity. But the misfortune is, that moſt men regard the ſtudy of theſe Laws, rather as an exerciſe of the mind, in the way of curious ſpeculation, than as an intereſting purſuit, which concerns their moral and religious practice. Which is juſt the ſame folly as would be charged on thoſe, who ſhould ſpend their lives in ſtudying the municipal Laws of their country, with a total unconcern about the obſervance of them in their own perſons.

Indeed, the penal ſanctions, which attend the violation of thoſe Laws, would preſently reclaim the ſtudent from this folly, and remind him of the *end*, to which his ſkill and knowledge in them ſhould

be

be principally directed. And, if in the ſtudy of general morals, or of revealed religion, he neglect to refer his ſpeculation to practice, it is only becauſe the penalties are leſs inſtant, or leſs conſtraining, and not that either the Law of Nature, or the Law of the Goſpel, is without its proper and ſuitable ſanctions.

I. Theſe ſanctions, as to *the Law of Nature*, as little as they are ſometimes conſidered, are eaſily pointed out. For who, that groſsly offends againſt that Law, but is puniſhed with ſelf-contempt; with an anxious dread of that power, which inſcribed the Law on his heart, and will, ſome way or other, ſecure the honour of it; with a ſenſible diminution of his health, or fortune, or reputation; ſometimes, with the decline of his parts and faculties; with many uneaſy and embaraſſing, however unforeſeen, ſituations, into which his vices lead him; with inevitable diſtreſſes, experienced in his own perſon, perhaps entailed on his poſterity;

in a word, ſooner or later, with a diſguſt of *this* life, and a trembling apprehenſion of what may befall him in a *future?*

By theſe penalties, is the LAW OF NATURE enforced: and they are ſuch, as muſt ſoon convince a thinking man, indeed every man, that his true intereſt lies in the obſervance of that Law. At the ſame time, it muſt be owned, that this Law is ſtrict and ſevere: It puniſhes with rigour, and rewards ſparingly. Diſobedience is certain, often, intenſe, miſery; while the moſt punctual compliance with it ſecures but a moderate enjoyment of this life, and ſo much happineſs in another (if indeed *any* happineſs can be hoped for) as in ſtrict juſtice may be required.

Yet *this* is the Law, which many, it ſeems, had rather live and dye under, than accept the benefit of a far BETTER. For

II. It pleaſed God, in compaſſion to his creature, man, not to leave him under this Law; but, by *a ſpecial revelation* of his

his will, to confer thoſe bleſſings upon him, which he had no ground in reaſon to expect, and no means in nature to obtain. Hence, *the free gift of immortality*, on the condition of obeying a certain precept, given to Adam. The *gift* was immenſe, and the *condition* eaſy: but, the *latter* not being obſerved, the *former* was as juſtly forfeited, as it had been graciouſly beſtowed.

Still, through the exhauſtleſs mercy of the ſupreme moral Governour, a way was found out, by which unhappy man might be reſtored to his loſt inheritance. He returned again, for the preſent, under the former yoke of Nature, or, at beſt, was committed to the tuition of a rigid *Schoolmaſter* (for ſuch St. Paul ſtyles the ritual Law of Moſes); with ſome *hopes*, indeed, of a better ſtate, to which he was one day to be advanced; but thoſe, darkly intimated, and imperfectly conceived. The divine purpoſe, however, was to lead him, by this wholeſome diſcipline, to Chriſt,

to the religion of his Son; who, in due time, vindicated the honour of God's government, by *fulfilling all righteouſneſs*; expiated the foul offence of man's diſobedience by his death upon the croſs; and reconveyed the ineſtimable gift of immortal life in happineſs, on the new terms of FAITH IN THE DIVINE SAVIOUR, by whoſe miniſtry this great work was atchieved. Thus, Jeſus became a ranſom for the ſins of mankind; appearing indeed in our nature at that ſeaſon, which was pre-ordained, but *being ſlain* (in the divine councils, and therefore the benefit of his death operating) *from the foundations of the world.*

This is a brief account of that great redemption in Chriſt Jeſus, by which we are again reſtored to thoſe hopes, which had been forfeited by Adam's tranſgreſſion. In conſequence of this diſpenſation, the reward of obedience is *eternal Life*: not of debt, but of grace, through faith in the Redeemer. But this is not all. To

facilitate and ſecure that *obedience* (to which ſo immenſe a benefit is now annexed) a perfect example of it is ſet before us in the perſon of Chriſt himſelf; and the holy Spirit is given to the faithful, to purify their hearts and lives, *and to fill them with all joy and peace in believing* [l]. On the other hand, the penalty of *diſobedience* (what could it be leſs?) is a perpetual excluſion from bliſs and glory, with ſuch a degree of poſitive ſuffering, annexed, as the reſpective demerits of incorrigible ſinners, or the ſanctity and wiſdom of the divine government, may demand.

Add to all this, that the ſame ſcriptures, which open to us the terms of this diſpenſation, declare, likewiſe, that no other terms will ever be offered; that we are *complete in Chriſt* [m]; that all the divine councils, in regard to man, are cloſed and ſhut up in *him*; and that no further ſa-

[l] Rom. xv. 13.
[m] Col. ii. 10.

crifice remains for ſin, but that every man, henceforth, muſt ſtand or fall by the terms of the everlaſting Goſpel.—*How then ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great Salvation?*

III. Still, as I ſaid, there are thoſe, who had rather truſt to the Law of Nature, than the Law of Grace; who had rather take their chance of being ſaved by the rule of their own Reaſon, than owe their Salvation to the methods preſcribed to them by the rule of the Goſpel.

Their pretences for this perverſe choice, are various: but the true reaſon, I ſuppoſe, is, that the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, though it be unſpeakably more benign, more gracious, more encouraging to the good and virtuous, is, at the ſame time, more awful, more terrifying, to reſolved impenitent ſinners, than the diſpenſation of Nature: and they are content to give up their hopes of that immortal prize, which the revelation of Jeſus holds out to them, rather than encounter the hazard

hazard of that ſevere ſentence, which attends the forfeiture of it.

Be it ſo then: ye had rather forego the hopes of heaven, than have your minds diſquieted with the fear of hell.

But, *firſt*, do ye not ſee, that there is ſomething baſe and abject in this diſpoſition? For what generous man will not aſpire to an immenſe reward, which heaven, in extreme kindneſs, may be almoſt ſaid to force upon him, becauſe there may be danger in coming ſhort of it? "Yes, but the danger is immenſe, too." Rather ſay, the loſs is immenſe: the danger of incurring this loſs, is not ſo. For what, indeed, is the danger, when heaven is your guide, and a crown of glory, your hope; when ye have God's word to aſſure you of the prize, ye contend for; when ye have the holy Spirit of God to aſſiſt you in the purſuit; when ye have the Son of God, your all-merciful Saviour himſelf, to be your Judge, and the diſpenſer of that prize to you; when, with

all

all theſe encouragements, ye are, beſides, quickened by a ſalutary fear of juſtice, on the other hand; and when all that is required of yourſelves is, a reaſonable faith, a willing mind, and a ſincere, though, in many reſpects, imperfect obedience. Is the danger to be much eſteemed, when the helps are ſo great, when the labour is ſo ſmall, and the ſucceſs almoſt certain? But,

Secondly, Conſider, alſo, whether ye do not even prevaricate with yourſelves, when ye ſay, ye had rather take up with a leſs reward, than run the hazard of ſo great a puniſhment. Ye certainly reſolve not to contend for any reward, at all, not even for the reward of Nature. If ye did, ye might with more eaſe, as well as certainty, obtain that of the Goſpel. For whether is eaſier, think ye, to obtain a gift from infinite mercy, or to extort a debt from infinite juſtice?

But, *Laſtly*, the matter is not left to your choice. When God, in his wiſdom, had

had projected a ſcheme for the ſalvation of mankind before the ages; when he had proſecuted that ſcheme by many ſucceſſive revelations of himſelf, by many notices and preparatory indications of his good pleaſure; when he had ſeparated a choſen family from the reſt of the world to ſerve as a repoſitory of his councils, and to miniſter to himſelf in the execution of them; when he had ſent forth his angels to aſſiſt in this great work, and had inſpired many prophets and holy men to ſignify, beforehand, the glories of a new kingdom which he meant to eſtabliſh on earth, and to prepare men for the reception of it: when, after all theſe preludes of his wiſdom and goodneſs, he came, in due time, to aſtoniſh the world with the completion of this adorable ſcheme, by ſending forth his only begotten Son, the expreſs image of his perſon, to take upon him our nature, to ſuffer and to dye for us; and, by raiſing up Apoſtles and Evangeliſts, under the guidance of his

his holy Spirit, to record theſe amazing tranſactions; and, by the atteſtation of ſtupendous miracles, to ſpread the knowledge of them over the face of the earth: when this, I ſay, and more had been done by the Almighty to uſher in his laſt beſt diſpenſation into the world, think not, that all this mighty apparatus was to be thrown away on our caprice or obſtinacy; and that, after all, we may be at liberty to reject his whole deſign, or take as much, or as little of it, as our wayward fancies ſhall ſuggeſt to us. No: aſſuredly the councils of heaven will ſtand firm, whatever attempts we may make in our wiſdom, or weakneſs, to ſubvert them. As well may we think to overturn the everlaſting mountains, or puſh the earth itſelf from its centre, as to defeat or ſet aſide one tittle of that *eternal purpoſe, which God hath purpoſed in Chriſt Jeſus* [n]. To whomſoever the ſound of the Goſpel is come, whether he will hear, or not hear, by that

[n] Epheſ. iii. 2.

Goſpel,

Goſpel he muſt ſtand or fall: he is, thenceforth, *under the bond of the Covenant:* through faith in Jeſus, he inherits the *promiſes*; or, if he withhold his faith, it is not at his option to have no concern in the *threats* of the Goſpel.

I know what is commonly ſaid to repreſentations of this ſort—"That *Faith* depends not on the *will*, but on the *underſtanding*: that, when the evidence for the truth of any propoſition is full and clear, it conſtrains my aſſent; when it is otherwiſe, I reject the propoſition, as falſe, or, at beſt, ſuſpend my belief of it; and, in either caſe, as without merit, ſo without blame: that no Law is obligatory to me, any farther than I ſee cauſe to admit the authority of it; and that no pretence of its divine original can ſubject me to the ſanctions of it, unleſs, on my beſt inquiry, I allow that claim to be well founded: that, conſequently, the Law of Chriſtianity cannot concern him, who is not convinced of its truth; that, where

this conviction is not, diſbelief muſt be a matter purely indifferent; and that *He* only is reſponſible to that Law, who underſtands it to be his duty to be controuled and governed by it."

This reaſoning is plauſible; and has many advocates, becauſe it flatters the pride and independency of the human mind.—But, when a Law is promulged with that evidence, which the *divine Legiſlator* (for of *ſuch* I am now ſpeaking) ſees to be ſufficient for the conviction of a reaſonable man, it is concluding too faſt, to ſuppoſe, that I am innocent in rejecting it; or that I am not bound by it, though I do reject it. Error, or unbelief, is only indifferent, when it is perfectly involuntary or invincible; but there is clearly no room for this plea in the preſent caſe, when, by the ſuppoſition, there is no want of fit evidence.

Even in the caſe of *human* Laws, my rejection of them may be blameable, though I neither admit the *authority*, nor the

the *equity* of the laws themſelves. For there *may* be evidence enough of *both*, if I will but attend to it. Now put the caſe of a *divine* Legiſlator; and what was *ſuppoſeable*, becomes *certain*. For the attributes of the Deity will permit no doubt, but that, when he gives a Law to man, he will afford ſuch proofs of it, as may, in reaſon, ſatisfy thoſe, to whom it is addreſſed. So that their rejection of it can only proceed from ſome neglect or wilfulneſs, on their own part, and not from the want of a ſufficient atteſtation, on the part of the Legiſlator.

Ye ſee then, there is no abſurdity in ſuppoſing the Law of Chriſtianity to oblige thoſe, who do not receive it: for if that Law be of God (and we argue now upon that hypotheſis) the evidence for it muſt be ſuch as is ſuited to our faculties; and being addreſſed, as the tenor of it ſhews, to all mankind, it binds of courſe all thoſe to whom that evidence has been ſubmitted.

And

And this indeed is the very language of that Law itſelf. For the Jews diſbelieved the Goſpel, when it was preached to them by our bleſſed Lord. But what ſays the Legiſlator to theſe unbelievers? Does he leave them to the Law of Nature, whoſe authority they did not diſpute, or to the Law of Moſes, which God himſelf, they knew, had given them? No ſuch thing: he tells them, that very Law, which they rejected, ſhould *judge* them. "He, that "rejecteth me, and receiveth not my "words, hath one that judgeth him: "the WORD, that I have ſpoken, the ſame "ſhall judge him in the laſt day°. And he aſſigns the reaſon of this determination—"For I have not ſpoken of myſelf; "but the Father, which ſent me, he "gave me a commandment, what I ſhould "ſay, and what I ſhould ſpeak:" that is, the Law, I give you, is of *divine authority*; and therefore not to be rejected without blame on any pretence by you,

° John xii. 48.

to

to whom the knowledge of it, and the proper evidence, on which it reſts, has been committed.

Theſe reflexions, I know, have ſmall weight with thoſe, who treat the evidences of the Goſpel with that ſcorn, which is familiar to ſome men. But ſuch perſons ſhould, at leaſt, ſee that their ſcorn be well founded. If not—but I will only ſay, they may ſubject themſelves, for aught they know, to the penalties of the Goſpel; I mean, to the future judgement of *that man*, *whom*, in this life, *they would not have to reign over them*[p].

But this remonſtrance is properly addreſſed to thoſe, *that are without*, to the contemners of the Chriſtian Law. To YOU, who are within the pale of Chriſt's Church, and acknowledge his authority; who profeſs yourſelves to be his ſervants; who admit no other Law, but in ſubjection to his, and have no expectation of life and glory from any other; to YOU, I

[p] Luke xix. 14.

ſay, the queſtion of the text is above meaſure intereſting, *How ſhall we eſcape if we neglect ſo great Salvation?*

Compaſſion, and prudence, and charity may reſtrain you from cenſuring with ſeverity the enemies of the faith; may diſpoſe you to overlook, or to ſoften at leaſt, the alarming denunciations of the Goſpel, in which they are concerned. But for YOURSELVES, who have given your names to Chriſt, and have hope in him only; who know the wonders of mercy that have been wrought for you, and were finally completed on that croſs, which is your truſt and conſolation, your pride and glory, it is almoſt needleſs to ſay what *your* intereſt, and what *your* obligation is, to obſerve, reſpect, and reverence the diſpenſation of the Goſpel. *Ye* are ſelf-condemned, if ye ſlight this Law: ye are ungrateful, up to all the poſſibilities of guilt, if ye make light of it: ye are undone for ever, if *ye neglect ſo great Salvation.*

What

What allowances it may pleaſe God to make for the prejudices, the paſſions, the ſlights, the blaſphemies of unthinking and careleſs men, who have never embraced the faith of Jeſus, it may not, perhaps, concern you to inquire. But ye know, that ye are reſponſible to that Law, which ye profeſs, and to that maſter, whom ye ſerve; that to you, indifference is infidelity; and diſobedience, treaſon; that willful unrepented ſin in a Chriſtian is without hope, as without excuſe, ſhuts him out from all the rewards, and expoſes him, even with his own full conſent, to all the puniſhments of the Goſpel.

In a word, as their *joy is great in believing*, who obey the Goſpel of Chriſt; ſo the guilt and the terror is proportionably great, to diſobedient believers. For, dreadful as *unbelief* may prove in the iſſue to ſuch as, through their own fault, have not come to the knowledge of Chriſt, *Belief*, without obedience, is more dreadful ſtill. I have an Apoſtle's warrant for

this assertion. *For it had been better for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us*[q].

[q] 2 Peter ii. 21.

SER-

SERMON VI.

Preached Nov. 16, 1766.

St. JOHN, ch. xiv. ver. 8.

Philip ſaith to him, Lord, ſhew us the Father, and it ſufficeth us.

OUR Lord, being now about *to depart out of the world*[r], prepares his diſciples for this unwelcome event by many conſolations and inſtructions. He acquaints them, more particularly than he had hitherto done, with his own *perſonal dignity*. He tells them that, *as they believed in God, they were alſo to believe in*

[r] St. John xiii. 1.

him[s]; and that, although he ſhould ſhortly leave them, it was only to remove from Earth to Heaven, to his *Father's houſe*, where he ſhould more than ever be mindful of their concerns, *and whither I go*, ſays he, *to prepare a place for you*[t]. And, to impreſs this *belief* (ſo neceſſary for their future ſupport under his *own*, and *their* approaching ſufferings) the more ſtrongly upon them, He declares, in the moſt authoritative manner, *that he*, only, *was the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and that no man could come to the Father, but by him*[u]. Nay, to ſhew them how great his intereſt was, and how cloſe his union, with the Father, he even adds, *If ye had known me, ye ſhould have known my Father alſo; and from henceforth*, continues he, *ye know him, and have ſeen him*[x].

This laſt declaration ſeemed ſo ſtrange to his diſciples, who had no notion of *ſeeing the Father* in our Lord's ſuffering ſtate, or indeed through any other me-

[s] St. John xiv. 1.
[t] Ch. xiv. 2.
[u] Ch. xiv. 6.
[x] Ch. xiv. 7.

dium,

dium, than that of thoſe triumphant honours, which their carnal expectations had deſtined to him, that one of them, the Apoſtle *Philip*, *ſaith to him*, *Lord*, *ſhew us the Father*, *and it ſufficeth us*. As if he had ſaid, "We know thee to be a "perſon of great holineſs, and have ſeen "many wonderful things done by thee; "ſo that we cannot doubt but that thou "art a prophet ſent from God, for ſome "great end and purpoſe of his providence. "But, if thy pretenſions go ſo far as to "require us *to believe in Thee*, *as in the* "*Father*; if we are to conceive of Thee, "as the only *Life* of the world; of ſo "great authority with God, as to pro-"cure *manſions* in heaven for thy diſ-"ciples; nay, of ſo great dignity in thine "own perſon, as to challenge the cloſeſt "*union* and communication with the eter-"nal Father; if, indeed, we are to be-"lieve ſuch great things of thee, it is "but reaſonable, as thou ſayeſt, that, "*in knowing and ſeeing thee*, *we alſo know*

" *and ſee the Father:* that we have the " cleareſt and moſt unqueſtioned proofs " of thy divinity. *Shew us,* then, *the* " *Father,* make us ſee the glorious ſym- " bols of his preſence; preſent us with " *ſuch* irreſiſtible demonſtrations of his " power and greatneſs, as were vouch- " ſafed to our Fathers, at the giving of " the Law; *ſuch,* as ſtrike conviction on " the ſenſes, and overrule all doubt and " diſtruſt in ſo high a matter; *ſhew us,* " I ſay, *the Father,* in this ſenſe, *and it* " *ſufficeth* to our perſuaſion and firm belief " in thee."

We ſee, in this conduct of the Apoſtle Philip, a natural picture of thoſe inquirers into the truth of our religion; who, becauſe they have not the higheſt poſſible evidence given them of it, (at leaſt, not that evidence, which they account the *higheſt)* are tempted, if not abſolutely to reject the faith, yet to entertain it with a great mixture of doubt and ſuſpicion, " If Chriſtianity, ſay they, " were

" were what it pretends to be, the argu-
" ments for it would be ſo deciſive, that
" nothing could be oppoſed to them; if
" it were, indeed, of God, the proofs of
" its claim had been ſuch and ſo many,
" that no ſcepticiſm could have taken
" place, no infidelity, at leaſt, could have
" kept its ground, againſt the force of
" them."

When this wild fancy comes to take poſſeſſion of mens minds, the whole tenour of God's diſpenſations, is quarrelled with, and diſputed: every circumſtance in our Lord's hiſtory, looks ſuſpicious: and every *fact*, applied to the confirmation of our holy faith, riſes into a preſumption againſt it.

The word of Prophecy has not been ſo clear and manifeſt, as it might have been: *therefore*, the proofs taken from it, are of no validity. The *miracles* of Chriſt were not ſo public or ſo illuſtrious, as might be conceived: *therefore*, they are no evidence of his divine miſſion. The *ſcene* of

of his birth and actions might have been more conſpicuous: *therefore*, the light of the world could not proceed from that quarter. The Goſpel itſelf was not delivered in that *manner*, nor by thoſe *inſtruments*, which they eſteem moſt fit; its *ſucceſs* in the world has not been ſo great, nor its *effects* on the lives of men, ſo ſalutary, as might have been expected: *therefore*, it could not be of divine original.

But there is no end of enumerating the inſtances of this folly. Let me obſerve, in one word, that the greater part of the objections, which weak or libertine men have oppoſed to the authority of revealed Religion, are of the ſame ſort with the demand in the text. The authors of them firſt *imagine* to themſelves, what evidence would be the moſt convincing; and then refuſe their *aſſent* to any other. Their conſtant language is that of the Apoſtle Philip—*ſhew us the Father, and it ſufficeth us.*

Now,

Now, to ſee how little force there is in this ſort of argumentation, let it be conſidered, that ſuch high demands of evidence for the truth of the Chriſtian revelation, are IMPERTINENT, at the beſt: that they are, moſt *probably*, on the part of the revealer, IMPROPER to be complied with: that they *muſt* be, on the part of man, PRESUMPTUOUS, and unwarrantable.

I. All demands of this ſort are clearly *impertinent*, and beſide the purpoſe of a fair inquirer into the authority of a divine Religion. For the queſtion is, whether ſuch religion be not accompanied with that *evidence*, which is ſufficient to determine the aſſent of a reaſonable man; not, whether it be the higheſt in its kind, or in its *degree*, which might be imagined. There is an infinite variety and, as we may ſay, gradation in the ſcale of moral evidence, from the higheſt forms of *demonſtration* down to the loweſt inducements of *probability*. The impatient mind of man, which loves to reſt in aſſurance, may

may demand the *former* of theſe in every caſe: but the juſt and ſober inquirer, whatever he may wiſh for, will ſubmit to the *latter*. He takes the argument, as preſented to him; he weighs the moment of it; and if, on the whole, it preponderates, though but by ſome ſcruples of probability, againſt the inductions on the other ſide, he is determined by this evidence, with as good reaſon, though not with as much aſſurance, as by demonſtration itſelf. His buſineſs, he knows, is to examine whether the concluſion be juſtly drawn, not whether it be irreſiſtibly forced upon him. It is enough, if the proof be ſuch as *merits* his aſſent, though it ſhould not *compell* it.

Apply, now, this univerſal rule of juſt reaſoning to the caſe of the *Goſpel*. Conſider it on the footing of that evidence, which it pretends to offer. If this evidence be weak and inconcluſive in itſelf, let it be rejected. But, if it be ſufficient to the purpoſe, for which it is given,

why look out for any *higher?* The pretenſions of Chriſtianity are, indeed, very great. It claims to be received by us, as the *work and word of God.* The proofs of its being ſuch ſhould, no doubt, be adapted to the nature of theſe pretenſions. If, in fact, they *be* ſo adapted, all further atteſtations of its truth, all ſtronger demonſtrations of its divinity (ſuppoſing there might be ſtronger) are, at leaſt, *unneceſſary:* our demands of them are without ground, and without reaſon: that is, they are clearly *not to the purpoſe* of this inquiry. But

II. The *impertinence* of theſe demands, is not all. There is good reaſon to believe, that they are, in themſelves, abſolutely unfit and IMPROPER to be complied with.

In ſaying this, I do not only mean that the *evidence*, ſuch men call for, is ſo far miſtaken as to be really of an inferiour ſort, and leſs convincing to a well-informed mind, than that which they reject.

This,

This, no doubt, is very frequently the caſe. It has been ſhewn in many inſtances, and even to the conviction of the objector himſelf, that ſuch circumſtances as have been thought moſt ſuſpicious, ſuch proofs as have appeared the weakeſt, have, upon inquiry, turned out, of all others, the ſtrongeſt and moſt ſatisfactory. For example, they who object to the *mean inſtruments*, by which the Chriſtian Religion was propagated, are confuted by the Apoſtle Paul himſelf; who has ſhewn *that very circumſtance* to be the cleareſt proof of its divinity; this method of publiſhing the Goſpel having been purpoſely choſen, *that our faith ſhould not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God*[z]. And the ſame anſwer will equally ſerve to many other pretences of the like nature.

But, as I ſaid, my intention is not, at preſent, to expoſe the common miſtake of preferring a *weaker* evidence to a *ſtronger*. Let it be allowed, that the evidence re-

[z] 1 Cor. ii. 5.

quired

quired is, in fact, the *ſtronger*. Still there is reaſon to think that *ſuch* evidence was not *proper* to be given. And I argue, *from the nature of the thing*; and *from the genius of the Goſpel*.

I. In *the nature of the thing* it ſeems not reaſonable that a divine revelation ſhould be obtruded upon men by the higheſt poſſible evidence. This would be to *conſtrain* their aſſent, not to *obtain* it: and the very eſſence of religion conſiſts in its being a *willing*, as well as *reaſonable*, ſervice.

Or, take the matter thus. On ſuppoſition that it ſhould pleaſe God to addreſs himſelf to man, it is to be preſumed he would treat him *as* man; that is, in a way, which is ſuitable to *the whole of his nature*. But *man* is not only an *intelligent* being, that is, capable of diſcerning the force of evidence, and of being determined by it: he is, alſo, a *moral* being, that is, capable of making a right or wrong uſe of his liberty. Now put the caſe of an

an over-powering, irreſiſtible evidence, and his *underſtanding* is convinced, indeed; but the *will*, that other and better half of his compoſition, the ſpring of liberty and of virtue, this, with all the energies depending upon it, is untouched, and has no ſhare in the operation. On the other hand, let the evidence ſubmitted to him be ſuch only as may ſatisfy his reaſon, if attentively, if modeſtly, if virtuouſly employed, and you ſee the whole man in play: his *intellectual* powers are conſidered, and his *moral* faculties, the faculties of a *wiſe and underſtanding heart*, applied to and exerted.

It ſeems, then, that, if a Revelation were given to man, it would moſt probably, and according to the beſt views we can form of the divine conduct, be given in this way; that is, in ſuch a way, as ſhould make it, at once, the proper object of his *faith*, and the teſt, I had almoſt ſaid the reward, of his *merit*.

And

And ſuch, we may obſerve, is the ſenſe of mankind in other inſtances of God's government. Who complains, that the ordinary bleſſings of heaven, the conveniences and accommodations of life, are not ready furniſhed and prepared to his hands? Who does not think it ſufficient, to our uſe and to God's glory, that we have the powers requiſite to prepare them? Why then expect this greateſt of God's bleſſings, a *divine Revelation*, to be made cheap in being forced upon us, whether we will or no, by an *evidence*, which ſilences reaſon, rather than employs it; and precludes the exerciſe of the nobleſt faculties, with which our nature is inveſted?

II. Thus, *the reaſon of the thing* affords a preſumption (I mean, if men will reaſon at all on ſuch matters), that theſe high demands in religion are *unfit* to be complied with. But we ſhall argue more ſafely, in the next place, from *the* GENIUS AND DECLARATIONS OF THE GOSPEL.

From the tenour of the Goſpel-revelation we learn, that, though a *reaſonable evidence* be afforded of its truth, yet the author and publiſhers of it were by no means ſollicitous to force it on the minds of men by an *unneceſſary and irreſiſtible evidence*.

We ſee this in the conduct of our Lord himſelf, who refuſed to gratify the curioſity both of friends and foes by needleſs *explanations* [a], or ſupernumerary *miracles* [b]. We ſee it, further, in his general method of ſpeaking by *Parables* [c]; which are ſo contrived as to inſtruct the attentive and willing hearer, but not the prejudiced or indifferent. Nay, when ſome of his parables were ſo obſcure as that they might ſeem to require an explanation, he did not always vouchſafe to give it before the people, but reſerved the expoſition of them for *his diſciples, in private* [d]. *To them,*

[a] Matt. xxi. 27.—xxii. 46.—xxvii. 14.
[b] Matt. xii. 38.—xvi. 1.
[c] Mark iv. 34.
[d] Mark iv. 34.

only,

only, *it was given to know the myſteries of the kingdom of heaven:* others, were left to their own interpretation of his *Parables* [e].

This proceeding of Chriſt plainly ſhews that he was not anxious to *inſtruct* or *convince* in that *way*, which might appear the moſt *direct* and *cogent*. It ſeems, on the contrary, to have been his choice to afford the ſtrongeſt proofs of his miſſion and the cleareſt views of his doctrine to *thoſe*, not whoſe incredulity needed his aſſiſtance moſt, but *who*, by their good diſpoſitions and moral qualities, deſerved it [f]. He thought not fit *to caſt pearls before ſwine* [g]; and, as contrary as it may be to our forward expectations, it was a rule with him, that *he that hath, to him it ſhould be given* [h].

That this was the genius of the Goſpel we further learn from the ſtreſs, which

[e] Mark iv. 11.
[f] Matt. xiii. 58. Mark ix. 23.
[g] Matt. vii. 6.
[h] Mark iv. 25.

is laid on *Faith*. It is everywhere demanded as a previous qualification in the aſpirants to this religion; it is everywhere ſpoken of, as the higheſt moral virtue: a repreſentation, ſtrange and impoſſible to be accounted for, if men were to be borne down by the weight of *evidence* only.

But, to put the matter out of all doubt, we have it declared to us in expreſs words, that thoſe converts are the moſt acceptable to Chriſt, who receive his religion, on a reaſonable, indeed, but inferiour evidence. When the Apoſtle Thomas expreſſed his belief, on the evidence of *ſenſe*, *Jeſus ſaith unto him, Thomas, becauſe thou haſt ſeen me, thou haſt believed: bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed*[m].

Now, whatever occaſion prophane men may take from this account of Goſpel-evidence to calumniate the divine author of our Faith, as though he relied more on the *credulity*, than the *conviction* of his

[m] John xx. 29.

follow-

followers, whatever perverſe uſe, I ſay, ſome men may be diſpoſed to make of this circumſtance, one thing, I ſuppoſe, is clear, "That the genius of the Goſpel "does, in fact, diſcountenance their *high* "*demands* of evidence." So that, taking the Chriſtian religion for *what it is* (and for *ſuch* only, the rules of good reaſoning oblige us to take it) it is very certain that no man is authorized to expect other or ſtronger proofs of its divinity, than have been given. On the contrary, ſuch proofs, as men account ſtronger, could only ſerve to weaken its evidence, and overthrow its pretenſions.

III. Laſtly, Though no *diſtinct reaſon* could have been oppoſed to theſe high expectations in religion, yet common ſenſe would have ſeen, "That they are, *in* "*general*, PRESUMPTUOUS AND UNWAR-"RANTABLE."

For what man, that thinks at all, but muſt acknowledge that ſacred truth, *that*

God's ways are not as our ways[n]; and that it is the height of mortal folly to preſcribe to the Almighty? *What man is he that can know the council of God? Or, who can think what the will of the Lord is?—Hardly do we gueſs aright at things that are upon the earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us: but the things that are in heaven who hath ſearched out*[o]?

Such paſſages, as theſe, have, I know, been ſometimes brought to inſult and diſgrace REASON, when employed the moſt ſoberly, and in her proper office. But I quote them for no ſuch purpoſe. I mean not to infer from theſe teſtimonies, that we are not competent judges of the evidence, which is laid before us (for why, then, was it offered?); but, that reaſon cannot tell us, *what* evidence it was fit for heaven to give of its own councils and revelations. We may conjecture,

[n] Iſaiah, lv. 8.
[o] Wiſdom, ix. 13.

modeſtly,

modeſtly conjecture, without blame. Nay the wiſeſt and beſt men, and even angels themſelves, have a reaſonable *deſire to look into* theſe things: and their *ſpeculations*, if duly governed, are, no doubt, commendable and uſeful. But we are not, upon this pretence, to dogmatize on ſuch matters. Much leſs, may we take upon us to reject a *well-atteſted* Revelation, a Revelation, that bears many characteriſtic marks, many illuſtrious ſignatures and impreſſes of divinity, becauſe this or that circumſtance, attending it, does not accord to our narrow views and ſhallow ſurmiſes. In ſhort, men would do well to remember that it is no leſs a maxim of *reaſon*, than of Scripture, *that the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God*[h]: a *maxim*, we ſhould never loſe ſight of, a moment, in our religious inquiries.

But this, though an *important* conſideration, is a common one, and I purſue it no farther. Let it ſuffice to have ſhewn,

[h] 1 Cor. ii. 11.

"That when, in matters of religion, men indulge themſelves in *fancying* what evidence would have been moſt convincing to them, and then erect ſuch fancies into *expectations*, they are, at beſt, employed very *idly*:"

"That the worthieſt apprehenſions, we can frame of the divine wiſdom, and both the genius and letter of the Chriſtian religion, diſcountenance theſe expectations, as *improper and unreaſonable* to be complied with:"

And, "that, from the ſlighteſt acquaintance with ourſelves, we muſt needs confeſs them to be *preſumptuous*."

The USE to be made of the whole, is, *that men think ſoberly, as they ought to think*[s]; and that, if ever their reſtleſs curioſity, or ſome worſe principle, impells them to make the demand in the text, *ſhew us the Father*, they repreſs the riſing folly by this juſt reflexion, that they have

[s] Rom. xii. 3.

no

no right, in their ſenſe of the word, *to ſee the Father*.

Not, but his infinite goodneſs hath vouchſafed to unveil himſelf ſo far, as is abundantly ſufficient to our conviction. But then we muſt be content to *ſee him* in that light, in which he has been graciouſly pleaſed to *ſhew* himſelf, not, in that *unapproachable light*[t], in which our madneſs requires to have him *ſhewn*, to us.

The evidences of Chriſtianity are not diſpenſed with a penurious hand: but they lie diſperſed in a very wide compaſs. They reſult from an infinite number of conſiderations, each of which has its weight, and all together *ſuch* moment, as *may be*, but is not eaſily reſiſted. To collect and eſtimate theſe, much labour and patience is to be endured; great parts of learning and genius are required; above all, an upright and pure mind is demanded. If, conſcious of our little worth or ability, we find ourſelves not equal to this taſk,

[t] Φῶς ἀπρόσιτον. 1 Tim. vi. 16.

let

let us adore in ſilence, and with that humility which becomes us. To call out for light, when we have enough to ſerve our purpoſe, is indeed *fooliſh:* but to make this noiſy demand, when we have previouſly blinded our eyes, or have reſolved to keep them ſhut, is ſomething *more* than folly.

After all, there is one way, in which the meaneſt of us may be indulged in the high privilege of SEEING *the Father*, at leaſt, in the *expreſs image* of his Son. It is, by keeping the commandments. *He, that hath my commandments, and keepeth them*, ſays our Lord himſelf, *I will love him, and will* MANIFEST *myſelf to him* [w]. In other words, he will ſee and acknowledge the *truth* of our divine religion.

[w] John xiv. 22.

SER-

SERMON VII.

Preached in the year 1771.

St. JAMES, iv. 1.

From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your luſts that war in your members?

INTERPRETERS have obſerved, that theſe queſtions refer to the ſtate of things, which then took place among the Jews, when this epiſtle was addreſſed to them. For, about that time, they had grievous *wars and fightings* among themſelves; every city, and every family, almoſt, of this devoted people, not only in Judea, but in many other countries, through

through which they were *ſcattered abroad*, being miſerably diſtracted and torn aſunder by civil and domeſtic factions.

This application, then, of the Apoſtle's words to the Jews of his own time, ſeems a juſt one. But we need look no further for a comment upon them, than to that *hoſtile* ſpirit, which too much prevails, at all times, and under all circumſtances, even among Chriſtians themſelves.

The root of this bitterneſs, we are told, is in *the luſts, that war in our members:* that is, there is, firſt, an inſurrection of our carnal appetites againſt the law of our minds; and, then, the contagion ſpreads over families, neighbourhoods, and ſocieties; over all thoſe, in ſhort, with whom we have any concern, till the whole world, ſometimes, becomes a general ſcene of contention and diſorder.

For, aſk the princes of this world, what prompts them to diſturb the peace of other ſtates, and to involve their ſubjects in all the horrors of war; and their anſwer,

ſwer, if they deign to give one, and if it be ingenuous, muſt, commonly, be, *their luſt of conqueſt and dominion.* Aſk the ſervants of thoſe princes, what ſplits them into parties and factions; and they can hardly avoid anſwering, or we can anſwer for them, *their luſt of wealth and power.* Aſk the people, at large, and under whatever denomination, what occaſions their contempt of authority, their diſobedience to magiſtrates, their tranſgreſſions of law, their cabals and tumults, their hatred, defamation, and perſecution of each other; and charity herſelf, for the moſt part, can dictate no other reply for them to this queſtion, than that they are excited to all theſe exceſſes by *the luſt of riot* and miſrule, or, of, what they call, LIBERTY.

But there is no end of purſuing this ſubject in all its applications to particular inſtances. What we have moſt reaſon to lament, is, that Chriſtians not only *fight* with each other, at the inſtigation of their *luſts*, for their own carnal and corrupt

rupt ends; but that they make the very *means*, which God has appointed to compoſe theſe differences, the inſtruments of their animoſity, and become outrageous in their hoſtile trearment of each other, by the perverſion of thoſe *principles*, which were intended to be its reſtraint. For, if any thing could appeaſe this tumult among men, what more likely to do it, than the *adminiſtration of civil juſtice*, and the *ſacred inſtitutions of religion?* Yet, are even theſe proviſions of divine and human wiſdom, for the ſupport of peace and good order, defeated by our reſtleſs and ingenious paſſions; and we contrive to make RELIGION and LAW themſelves, ſubſervient to the increaſe of that contention, which they tend ſo naturally to keep out of the world.

As this abuſe, which inverts the order of things, and turns the medicine of life into a deadly poiſon—as this abuſe, I ſay, can never be enough expoſed; let me repreſent to you ſome part of the evils, which

which this monſtrous miſuſe of RELIGION and CIVIL JUSTICE has brought upon mankind; as the laſt, and moſt ſtriking effort of theſe malignant *luſts*, from which, according to the holy Apoſtle, all our violations of peace and charity are derived.

And, FIRST, of the miſchiefs, ariſing from MISAPPLIED RELIGION.

It were an ample field, this, ſhould I undertake to follow the eccleſiaſtical hiſtorian in all the abuſes, which he ſo largely diſplays. But my deſign is to *open the fountains*; to point, only, to the *general cauſes*, from which thoſe abuſes have flowed. And the chief of theſe *cauſes* will not be overlooked, if we conſider that Chriſtianity has been corrupted by *ſuperſtition*, by *policy*, and by *ſophiſtry*: for, in each of theſe ways, the *luſts* of men have found free ſcope for their activity; and have produced all thoſe endleſs diſcords and animoſities, which have diſhonoured the Chriſtian world.

1. SUPERSTITION began very early to make cruel inroads into the religion of Jeſus: *firſt*, by debaſing its free ſpirit with the ſervility of Jewiſh obſervances; next, in adulterating its ſimple genius by the pomp of pagan ceremonies; and, afterwards, through a long courſe of dark and barbarous ages, in diſfiguring its *reaſonable ſervice*[m] by every whimſy, which a gloomy or diſturbed imagination could ſuggeſt.

The *luſts* of men gave birth to theſe ſeveral perverſions. The obſtinate *pride* of the Jewiſh Chriſtian was flattered in retaining the abrogated ritual of the Law: the pagan proſelyte gratified his *vanity*, and love of ſplendor in religious miniſtrations, by dreſſing out Chriſtianity in all the paint and pageantry of his antient worſhip: and the miſerable monk ſoothed his *fears*, or indulged his *ſpite*, in buſying himſelf with I know not what uncommanded and frivolous expiations, or in torturing others with the rigours of a fruitleſs penance.

[m] Τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν. Rom. xii. 1.

From

From theſe rank paſſions, ſprung up *wars* in abundance among Chriſtians. The Apoſtles themſelves could not prevent their followers from *fighting* with each other, in the cauſe of *circumciſion.* The ſuperſtition of *days* [a], and of *images* [b], grew ſo fierce, that the whole Chriſtian world was, at different times, thrown into convulſions by it. And the dreams of monkery excited every where the moſt implacable feuds; which had, commonly, no higher object, than the credit of their ſeveral *Rules*, or the honour of their *Patron-ſaints.*

2. When ſuperſtition had thus ſet the world on fire, a godleſs POLICY ſtruck in, to encreaſe the combuſtion.

The Chriſtian religion, which had TRUTH for its object, could not but require an aſſent from its profeſſors to the doctrines, it revealed; and, having GOD for its author, it, of courſe, exacted a com-

[a] The diſpute about *Eaſter*, in the ſecond century.
[b] The diſpute about *Images*, in the eighth century.

pliance with the few ritual obſervances, which he ſaw fit to ordain. But the wantonneſs, or weakneſs, of the human mind, introducing a different interpretation of thoſe *doctrines*, and a different miniſtration of thoſe *rites*, the policy of princes would not condeſcend to tolerate ſuch unavoidable differences, but would enforce a rigid uniformity both of ſentiment and ceremony, as moſt conducive, in their ideas, to the quiet and ſtability of their government.

Again: the honour of prelates and churches ſeemed to be concerned in all queſtions concerning place and juriſdiction; and, when theſe queſtions aroſe, was to be maintained by every artifice, which an intereſted and ſecular wiſdom could contrive.

The *luſt* of dominion, was plainly at the bottom of theſe infernal machinations; and the fruit, it produced, was the moſt bloody and unrelenting wars, maſſacres, and perſecutions; with which the annals of mankind are polluted and diſgraced. But

3. To

3. To work up theſe two peſts of humanity, *ſuperſtition, and intolerance*, to all the fury, of which they are capable, unbleſſed SCIENCE and perverted REASON lent their aid.

For the pride of knowledge begot innumerable portentous hereſies: which not only corrupted the divine religion of Jeſus (obnoxious to ſome taint from the impure touch of human reaſon, becauſe *divine*), but envenomed the hearts of its profeſſors againſt each other, by infuſing into them a bitter ſpirit of altercation and diſpute.

In theſe ſeveral ways, then, and from theſe cauſes, has our holy religion been abuſed. The *luſts* of men have turned the Goſpel of peace itſelf into an inſtrument of *war:* a miſadventure, which could not have taken place, had Chriſtians but recollected and practiſed one ſingle precept of their maſter — *Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye ſhall find reſt to your ſouls*[e].

[e] Matt. xi. 29.

But the perverſity of man could not be brought to learn this ſalutary leſſon; and ſo has fulfilled that memorable ſaying of our Lord, who, foreſeeing what abuſes would hereafter be made of his charitable ſyſtem, declared of himſelf—*I came not to ſend peace, but a ſword*[f]. This prediction, at leaſt, the enemies of our faith are ready enough to tell us, has been amply verified, in the event. It has been ſo: it was therefore inſpired, becauſe it was to be fulfilled. But let them remember, withall, that not the genius of the Goſpel, but man's incorrigible paſſions, acting in defiance of it, have given to this prophecy its entire completion.

I come now to repreſent to you,

II. In the ſecond place, how the *luſts* of men have perverted CIVIL JUSTICE, as well as religion, into an inſtrument of contention and hate.

The object of all civil, or municipal laws, is the conſervation of private peace,

[f] Matt. x. 34.

in

in the equal protection they afford to the property and perſons of men. Yet, how often have they been employed to other purpoſes, *by thoſe, who adminiſter the Laws*; and *by thoſe, for whoſe ſake they are adminiſtered!*

1. In reading the hiſtory of mankind, one cannot but obſerve, with indignation, how frequently the magiſtrate himſelf has turned the Law, by which he governs, into an engine of oppreſſion: ſometimes, directing it againſt the liberties of the ſtate; and ſometimes, againſt the private rights of individuals. It were a ſmall matter, perhaps, if he only took advantage of a *ſevere* law, or drew over an *ambiguous* one, to countenance his iniquitous purpoſes. But how oft has he embittered the mildeſt, or tortured the plaineſt laws, by malignant gloſſes and ſtrained interpretations! gratifying, in both ways, his revenge, his avarice, or his ambition; yet ſtill in the forms of Law, and under the mantle, as it were, of public juſtice!

Such abuſes there *have* been in moſt ſtates, and, it may be, in our own. God forbid, that, ſtanding in this place, I ſhould *accept the perſons of men, or give flattering titles unto any*[n]. But truth obliges me to ſay, that there is, now, no colour for theſe complaints. The adminiſtration of juſtice, on the part of the *Magiſtrate*, is ſo pure, as to be the glory of the age, in which we live. The abuſes all ariſe from another quarter; and the contentious ſpirit is kept alive and propagated by the luſts of private men. And what renders their iniquity without excuſe, is, that the very equity of thoſe forms, in which our laws are adminiſtered, is made the occaſion of introducing all theſe corruptions.

To come to *a detail* on this ſubject, might be thought improper. Let me paint to you, then, in very *general* terms, the diſorders that ſpring from this perverſion of Law; and, to do it with ad-

[n] Job xxxii. 21.

vantage,

vantage, let me employ the expreſſive words of an antient Pagan writer.

The Roman governors of provinces, it is well known, had their times for the more ſolemn adminiſtration of civil juſtice. Suppoſe, then, one of theſe governors to have fixed his reſidence in the capital of an Aſiatic province, to have appointed a day for this ſolemnity, and, with his Lictors and other enſigns of authority about him, to be now ſeated in the forum, or public place of the city; and conſider, if the following repreſentation of an indifferent by-ſtander be not natural and inſtructive.

" See," ſays the eloquent writer °, whoſe words I only tranſlate, " ſee that vaſt and " mixt multitude aſſembled together be- " fore you. You aſk, what has occaſioned " this mighty concourſe of people. Are " they met to ſacrifice to their country

° Plutarch, or whoever was the author of a fragment, printed among his moral diſcourſes, and entitled, πότερον τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ τὰ τῦ σώματος πάθη χείρονα. Par. Ed. vol. ii. p. 500.

" Gods, and to communicate with each
" other in the ſacred offices of their reli-
" gion? Are they going to offer the Lydian
" firſt-fruits to the Aſcræan Jupiter? or,
" are they aſſembled in ſuch numbers to
" celebrate the rites of Bacchus, with the
" uſual feſtivity? Alas, no. Neither pious
" gratitude, nor feſtal joy, inſpires them.
" *One* fierce unfriendly paſſion *only* pre-
" vails; whoſe epidemic rage has ſtirred
" up all Aſia, and, as returning with re-
" doubled force on this ſtated anniverſary,
" has driven theſe frantic crouds to the
" forum; where they are going to engage
" in law-ſuits with each other, before
" the Judges. An infinite number of
" cauſes, like ſo many confluent ſtreams,
" ruſh together, in one common tide, to
" the ſame tribunal. The paſſions of the
" contending parties are all on fire; and
" the end of this furious conflict is, the
" ruin of themſelves and others. What
" fevers, what calentures, what aduſt
" temperament of the body, or overflow
" of

" of its vicious humours, is to be com-
" pared to this plague of the diſtempered
" mind? Were you to interrogate each
" cauſe (in the manner you examine a
" witneſs) as it appears before this tri-
" bunal, and aſk, WHENCE IT CAME? the
" anſwer would be, an obſtinate and ſelf-
" willed ſpirit produced *this*; a bitter rage
" of contention, *that*; and a luſt of re-
" venge and injuſtice, *another*."

It is not to be doubted, that this rage of the contending parties was inflamed, in thoſe times, by mercenary agents and venal orators; by men, who employed every fetch of cunning, and every artifice of chicane, to perplex the cleareſt laws, to retard the deciſion of the plaineſt caſes, and to elude the ſentence of the ableſt judges. Without ſome ſuch management, as this, the paſſions of the litigants could not have been kept up in ſuch heat and fury, but muſt gradually have cooled, and died away of themſelves. Add this, then, to the other features, ſo well delineated,

and

and you will have the picture of *antient litigation* complete.

And what think we, now, of this picture? Is there truth and nature in it? Are we at all concerned in this repreſentation; and do we diſcover any reſemblance to it in what is paſſing elſewhere, I mean in modern times, and even in Chriſtian ſocieties? If we do, let us acknowledge with honeſty, but indeed with double ſhame, that, like the Pagans of old, we have the art to pervert the beſt things to the worſt purpoſes; and that the *luſts* of men are ſtill predominant over the wiſeſt and moſt beneficent inſtitutions of civil juſtice.

Indeed, as to ourſelves, the mild and equitable ſpirit of our laws might be enough, one would think, to inſpire another temper: but, when we further conſider the divine ſpirit of the Goſpel, by which we pretend to be governed, and the end of which is *charity*, our prodi-

gious

gious abuſe of *both* muſt needs cover us with confuſion.

The inſtruction, then, from what has been ſaid, is this: That, ſince, as St. James obſerves, all our *wars and fightings* with each other, proceed only from our *luſts*, and ſince *theſe* have even prevailed to that degree as to corrupt the two beſt gifts, which God, in his mercy, ever beſtowed on mankind, that is, to make *Religion* and *Law* ſubſervient to our bitter animoſities; ſince all this, I ſay, has been made appear in the preceding comment on the ſacred text, it becomes us, ſeverally, to conſider what *our* part has been in the diſordered ſcene, now ſet before us: what care we have taken to check thoſe unruly paſſions, which are ſo apt, by indulgence, to tyrannize over us; and, if this care has been leſs than it ought to have been, what may be the conſequence of our neglect. We ſhould, in a word, *take heed, how we bite and devour one another*; not only, as the

Apoſtle

Apoſtle admoniſhes, *that we be not conſumed one of another*, but leſt, in the end, we incur the chaſtiſement of that LAW, we have ſo induſtriouſly perverted, and the ſtill ſorer chaſtiſement of that RELIGION, we have ſo impiouſly abuſed.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

Preached April 29, 1770.

1 TIM. i. 5.

The end of the Commandment is Charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conſcience, and of faith unfeigned.

THE Apoſtle, in the preceding verſe, had warned Timothy againſt *giving heed to fables and endleſs genealogies:* by FABLES, meaning certain Jewiſh fictions and traditions applied to the explication of theological queſtions, and not unlike the tales of the pagan mythologiſts, contrived by them to cover the monſtrous ſtories of their Gods; and, by GENEALOGIES, the derivation of Angelic and

Spiritual natures [q], according to a fantaſtic ſyſtem, invented by the Oriental philoſophers, and thence adopted by ſome of the Grecian Sects. Theſe *fables and genealogies* (by which the Jewiſh and Pagan converts to Chriſtianity had much adulterated the faith of the Goſpel) the Apoſtle ſets himſelf to expoſe and reprobate, as producing nothing but curious and fruitleſs diſputations; being indeed, as he calls them, *endleſs*, or interminable [r]; becauſe, having no foundation in the revealed word of God, they were drawn out, varied, and multiplied at pleaſure by thoſe, who delighted in ſuch fanatical viſions.

Then follows the text—*The end of the Commandment, is* CHARITY: *out of a* PURE HEART: *and of a* GOOD CONSCIENCE; *and of* FAITH UNFEIGNED—As if the Apoſtle had ſaid, "I have cautioned you againſt this pernicious folly: but, if ye muſt needs deal in the way of Mythology

[q] Called *Æones*. See Grotius in loc.

[r] Ἀπεράντοις.

and

and Genealogy, I will tell you how ye may employ your ingenuity to more advantage. Take Chriſtian *Charity*, for your theme: *mythologize* that capital Grace of your profeſſion; or, deduce the *parentage* of it, according to the ſteps, which I will point out to you. For it ſprings immediately out of *a pure heart*; which, itſelf, is derived from *a good conſcience*; as that, again, is the genuine offspring or emanation of *faith unfeigned*. In this way, ye may gratify your mythologic or genealogical vein, innocently and uſefully [s]; for ye may learn yourſelves, and teach others, how to acquire and perfect that character, which is the great object of your religion, and *the end of the Commandment*."

Let us, then, if you pleaſe, attend to this genealogical deduction of the learned Apoſtle; and ſee, if the deſcent of Chriſtian charity be not truly and properly inveſtigated by him.

[s] Dat nobis et Paulus brevem γενεαλογίαν, ſed pertilem. GROTIUS.

I. CHARITY,

I. CHARITY, ſays he, is *out of a pure heart:* that is, it proceeds from a heart, free from the habits of ſin, and unpolluted by corrupt affections.

To ſee with what propriety, the Apoſtle makes a pure heart the *parent* of charity, we are to reflect, that this benevolent temper, which inclines us to wiſh and do well to others, is the proper growth and produce, indeed, of the human mind, but of the human mind in its native and original integrity. To provide effectually for the maintenance of the ſocial virtues, it hath pleaſed God to implant in man, not only the power of reaſon, which enables him to ſee the connexion between his own happineſs and that of others, but alſo certain inſtincts and propenſities, which make him *feel* it, and, without reflexion, incline him to take part in foreign intereſts. For, among the other wonders of our make, this is *one*, that we are ſo formed as, whether we will or no, *to rejoyce with them that rejoyce, and weep with*

them that weep [t]. But now this ſympathetic tenderneſs, which nature hath put into our hearts for the concerns of each other, may be much impaired by habitual neglect, or ſelfiſh gratifications. If, inſtead of liſtening to thoſe calls of nature, which, on the entrance into life, are inceſſantly, but gently, urging us to acts of generoſity, we turn a deaf ear to them, and, charmed by the ſuggeſtions of ſelf-love, yield up ourſelves to the dominion of the groſſer appetite, it cannot be but that the love of others, however natural to us, muſt decline, and become, at length, a feeble motive to action; or, which amounts to the ſame thing, be conſtantly overpowered by the undue prevalence of other principles. Thus we may ſee, how ambition, avarice, ſenſuality, or any other of the more ſelfiſh paſſions, tends directly, by indulgence, to obſtruct the growth of *charity*; and how favourable an uncorrupt

[t] Rom. xii. 15.

mind is to the production and maturity of this divine virtue.

But, further, the impurities of the heart do not only hinder the exertions of *benevolence*, they have even a worſe effect, they cauſe us to pervert and miſapply it. It is not, perhaps, ſo eaſy a matter, as ſome imagine, to diveſt ourſelves of all attachment to the intereſt of our fellow-creatures. But, by a long miſuſe of our faculties, we may come in time to miſtake the objects of *true* intereſt; and ſo be carried, by the motives of benevolence itſelf, to do irreparable miſchief to thoſe, we would moſt befriend and oblige. This ſeems to be the caſe of thoſe moſt abandoned of all ſinners, who take pains to corrupt others, and not only do wicked things themſelves, *but have pleaſure in thoſe who do them*[u]. All that can be ſaid for theſe unhappy victims of their own luſts, is, that their *perverted benevolence* prompts them to encourage others in that courſe

[u] Rom. i. 32.

of

of life, from which, if it were rightly exerciſed, they would endeavour, with all their power, to divert them.

So neceſſary it is, that charity ſhould be out of *a pure heart!* it is polluted in its very birth, unleſs it proceed from an honeſt mind: it is ſpurious and illegitimate, if it be not ſo deſcended.

II. The next ſtep in this line of moral anceſtry, is a GOOD CONSCIENCE: which phraſe is not to be taken here in the negative ſenſe, and as equivalent only to a *pure heart*; but as expreſſing a further, a *poſitive* degree of goodneſs. For ſo we find it explained elſewhere; *having*, ſays St. Peter, *a* GOOD CONSCIENCE, *that whereas, they ſpeak evil of you, as* EVIL DOERS, *they may be aſhamed that falſely accuſe your* GOOD CONVERSATION *in Chriſt Jeſus: for it is better, if the will of God be ſo, that ye ſuffer for* WELL DOING, *than for evil doing* [x]. Whence, by *a good conſcience*, we are authorized to underſtand a mind, *con-*

[x] 1 Peter iii. 16.

ſcious to itſelf of beneficent actions. And thus the Apoſtle's intention will be, to inſinuate to us, that, to be free from *depraved affections*, we muſt be actively virtuous; and that we muſt be *zealous* in good works, if we would attain to that *purity* of heart, which is proper to beget the genuine virtue of Chriſtian charity.

For, we may conceive of the matter, thus. A *good conſcience*, or a mind enured to right action, is moſt likely, and beſt enabled, to ſhake off all corrupt partialities; and, as being intent on the ſtrenuous exerciſe of its duty, in particular inſtances, to acquire, in the end, that tone of virtue, which ſtrengthens, at once, and refines the affections, till they expand themſelves into an univerſal good-will. Thus we ſee, that, without this moral diſcipline, we ſhould ſcarce poſſeſs, or not long retain, a *pure heart*; and that the heart, if *pure*, would yet be inert and ſluggiſh, and unapt to entertain that prompt and ready benevolence, which true charity implies.

So

So that an active practical virtue, as ſerving both to purify and invigorate the kind affections, has deſervedly a place given to it in this lineal deſcent of Chriſtian love. But

III. The Apoſtle riſes higher yet in this genealogical ſcale of charity, and acquaints us that a *good conſcience*, or a courſe of active poſitive virtue, is not properly and lawfully deſcended, unleſs it proceed from a FAITH UNFEIGNED, that is, a ſincere undiſſembled belief of the Chriſtian religion.

And the reaſon is plain. For there is no dependance on virtuous practice, we cannot expect that it ſhould either be ſteady, or laſting, unleſs the principle, from which it flows, be ſomething nobler and more efficacious, than conſiderations taken from the beauty, propriety, and uſefulneſs of virtue itſelf. Our active powers have need to be ſuſtained and ſtrengthened by energies of a higher kind, than thoſe which mere philoſophy ſup-

plies. We ſhall neither be able to bear up againſt the difficulties of a good life, nor to ſtand out againſt the temptations, which an evil world is always ready to throw in our way, but by placing a firm truſt on the promiſes of God, and by keeping our minds fixed on the glorious hopes and aſſurances of the Goſpel. And *experience* may ſatisfy us, that practical virtue has no ſtability or conſiſtency, without theſe ſupports.

Beſides, conſidering a *good conſcience*, or a moral practical conduct, with an eye to its influence on a *pure heart*, till it iſſue in complete *charity*, we cannot but ſee how the Chriſtian faith is calculated to direct its progreſs, and ſecure the great end propoſed. For the whole ſyſtem of our divine religion, which hath its foundation in *grace*; its *precepts*, which breathe nothing but love and amity; its *doctrines*, which only preſent to us, under different views, the tranſcendant goodneſs of God in the great work of redemption; its *hiſtory*, which records the moſt

moſt engaging inſtances of active benevolence; all this cannot but exceedingly inſpirit our affections, and carry them out in a vigorous and uniform proſecution of the ſubordinate *means*, which are to produce that laſt perfection of our nature, a pure and permanent love of mankind. For at every ſtep we cannot but ſee the *end of the commandment*, ſo perpetually objected to us, and derive a freſh inducement from *faith*, to accompliſh and obtain it.

Indeed, to produce this effect, our *faith*, as the Apoſtle adds, muſt be UNFEIGNED: that is, it muſt be nouriſhed and intimately rooted in the heart; we muſt not only yield a general aſſent to the ſacred truths of our religion, we muſt embrace them with earneſtneſs and zeal, we muſt rely upon them with an unſhaken confidence and reſolution. But all this will be no difficulty to thoſe who derive their *faith* from its proper ſource, that is, who make a diligent ſtudy of the holy ſcrip-

plies. We ſhall neither be able to bear up againſt the difficulties of a good life, nor to ſtand out againſt the temptations, which an evil world is always ready to throw in our way, but by placing a firm truſt on the promiſes of God, and by keeping our minds fixed on the glorious hopes and aſſurances of the Goſpel. And *experience* may ſatisfy us, that practical virtue has no ſtability or conſiſtency, without theſe ſupports.

Beſides, conſidering a *good conſcience*, or a moral practical conduct, with an eye to its influence on a *pure heart*, till it iſſue in complete *charity*, we cannot but ſee how the Chriſtian faith is calculated to direct its progreſs, and ſecure the great end propoſed. For the whole ſyſtem of our divine religion, which hath its foundation in *grace*; its *precepts*, which breathe nothing but love and amity; its *doctrines*, which only preſent to us, under different views, the tranſcendant goodneſs of God in the great work of redemption; its *hiſtory*, which records the moſt

moſt engaging inſtances of active benevolence; all this cannot but exceedingly inſpirit our affections, and carry them out in a vigorous and uniform proſecution of the ſubordinate *means*, which are to produce that laſt perfection of our nature, a pure and permanent love of mankind. For at every ſtep we cannot but ſee the *end of the commandment*, ſo perpetually objected to us, and derive a freſh inducement from *faith*, to accompliſh and obtain it.

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tures: where *only* we learn what the *true* faith (which will ever be moſt friendly to virtue) is; and whence we ſhall *beſt* derive thoſe motives and conſiderations, which are proper to excite and fortify this principle in us.

And thus, that Charity, which a *pure mind* gives the liberty of exerting, and which a *good conſcience* manifeſts and at the ſame time improves, will, further, be ſo ſublimed and perfected by the influence of divine *faith*, as will render it the ſovereign guide of life, and the pride and ornament of humanity.

Or, to place the deſcent of Charity, in its true and natural order, it muſt ſpring, firſt, from an *unfeigned faith* in the Goſpel of Jeſus: that faith muſt then produce, and ſhew itſelf in, a *good conſcience*: and that conſcience muſt be thoroughly purged from all ſelfiſh and diſorderly *affections*: whence, laſtly, the celeſtial offspring of *Charity* has its birth, and comes forth in all the purity and integrity of its nature.

FROM

FROM THIS lineage of Chriſtian Charity, thus deduced, many inſtructive leſſons may be drawn. We may learn to diſtinguiſh the true and genuine, from pretended Charity: we have, hence, the ſureſt way of diſcerning the ſpirits of other men, and of trying our own: we may correct ſome popular miſtakes concerning the virtue of charity; and ſhall beſt comprehend the force and ſignificancy of the ſeveral commendations, which the inſpired writers, in many places, and in very general terms, beſtow upon it.

Let me conclude this diſcourſe with an inſtance of ſuch inſtruction, reſpecting each of thoſe heads, which the order of the text hath afforded the opportunity of conſidering.

And, *firſt*, from the neceſſity of a PURE HEART, we are inſtructed what to think of the benevolence of thoſe men, who, though enſlaved to their own ſelfiſh paſſions, are ſeldom the moſt backward to make large pretences to this virtue. But, be their pretences what they will, we know

know with certainty, that, if the heart be impure, its charity muſt be defective. It muſt, of courſe, be weak and partial; confined in its views, and languid in its operations; in a word, a faint and powerleſs quality, and not that generous, diffuſive, univerſal principle, which alone deſerves the exalted name of *Charity*.

We conclude, alſo, on the ſame grounds, that the hatred of vice is no breach of Chriſtian charity. This charity is required to flow from a *pure heart*. But there is not in nature a ſtronger antipathy, than between *purity*, and *impurity*. So that we might as well expect light and darkneſs, heat and cold to aſſociate, as ſpotleſs virtue not to take offence at its oppoſite. I know, indeed, that the hatred due to the vices of men, is too eaſily tranſferred to their perſons. But that charity, which is lineally deſcended from *faith*, will ſee to make a difference between them; and, while it feels a quick reſentment againſt *ſin*, will conceive, nay will,

will, by that very reſentment, demonſtrate, a tender concern for *ſinners*, for whom Chriſt died.

Secondly, from the rank, which a GOOD CONSCIENCE holds in this family of love, we are admoniſhed to avoid the miſtake of thoſe, who are inclined to reſt in negative virtue, as the *end of the commandment*; and who account their charity full and complete, when it keeps them only from intending, or doing miſchief to others. The Apoſtle, on the contrary, gives us to underſtand, that its deſcent is irregular, if it be not allied to active poſitive virtue; ſuch as takes a pleaſure in kind offices, is zealous to promote the welfare of others, and is fertile in *good works*. And this concluſion is the more neceſſary to be inforced upon us, ſince, in a world like this, where vice is ſure to be active enough, the intereſts of ſociety will not permit, that charity ſhould be idle.

Laſtly, from the lineal deſcent of charity from FAITH, we muſt needs infer, that infidelity

infidelity is not a matter of that indifference to ſocial life, which many careleſs perſons ſuppoſe it to be. It is the glory of our faith, that it terminates in charity. Every article of our creed is a freſh incitement to good works: in ſo much that, he, who underſtands his religion moſt perfectly, and is moſt firmly perſuaded of it, can ſcarce fail of approving himſelf the beſt *man*, as well as the beſt *Chriſtian*. And this, again, is a conſideration, which ſhould affect all thoſe, who profeſs to have any concern for the intereſts of ſociety and moral virtue.

Thus it appears, how inſtructive the doctrine of the text is, and how uſefully, as well as elegantly, the Apoſtle ſets before us, in this ſhort genealogical table, the proper anceſtry of charity: in which *faith*, as the ultimate progenitor, begets an *active virtue*; and that, impregnating the *heart* with pure affections, produces at length this divine offſpring of *Chriſtian love*.

If

If we had found this mythological fiction in Xenophon or Plato, we ſhould have much admired the inſtruction conveyed in it. Let it not abate our reverence for this moral leſſon, that it comes from an Apoſtle of Jeſus, and, if not dreſſed out in the charms of human eloquence, has all the authority of truth and divine inſpiration to recommend it to us.

SERMON IX.

Preached Nov. 9, 1766.

ROM. xii. 10.

—In honour preferring one another.

IT is much to the honour of the inſpired writers, becauſe it ſhews them to be no enthuſiaſts, that, with all their zeal for the revealed doctrines of the Goſpel, they never forget or overlook the common duties of *humanity*; thoſe duties, which Reaſon itſelf, a prior Revelation, had made known to the wiſer part of mankind.

Nay, what is more remarkable, they ſometimes condeſcend to enforce what are called the *leſſer moralities*[a]; that is, thoſe inferiour duties, which, not being of abſolute neceſſity to the ſupport of human ſociety, are frequently overlooked by other moraliſts, and yet, as contributing very much to the comfortable enjoyment of it, are of *real* moment, and deſerve a ſuitable regard.

The text is an inſtance of this ſort —*in honour preferring one another*—the NATURE, and GROUND, and right APPLICATION, of which duty, it is my preſent purpoſe to explain.

I. The general NATURE of this virtue conſiſts in a diſpoſition to expreſs our good-will to others by exteriour teſtimonies of reſpect; to conſult the credit and honour of thoſe we converſe with, though at ſome expence of our own vanity and ſelf-love.

[a] *Les petites morales*; as the French moraliſts call them.

It

It implies a readineſs to prevent them in the cuſtomary decencies of converſation; a facility to give way to their reaſonable pretenſions, and even to abate ſomething of our own juſt rights. It requires us to ſuppreſs our petulant claims of ſuperiority; to decline all frivolous conteſts and petty rivalries; to moderate our own demands of pre-eminence and priority; and, in a word, to pleaſe others, rather than ourſelves.

It is an eaſy, ſocial, conciliating virtue; a virtue, made up of *humility* and *benevolence*; the *former*, inclining us not to think more highly of ourſelves than we ought; and the *latter*, to give our Chriſtian brother an innocent ſatisfaction when we can.

And our obligation to the practice of this virtue is FOUNDED,

II. On the cleareſt reaſons, taken both from the *nature of man*, and the *genius of our holy Religion*.

And, FIRST, from *the nature of man.*

Among the various principles, ſome of them, in appearance, diſcordant and contradictory, which conſtitute our common nature, one of the firſt to take our attention is, "A conſcious ſenſe of dignity;" an opinion of ſelf-conſequence, which mixes itſelf with all our thoughts and deliberations; prompting us to entertain lofty ſentiments of our own worth, and aſpiring to ſomething like ſuperiority and dominion over other men. This principle, which appears very early, and is ſtrongeſt in the more generous diſpoſitions, is highly neceſſary to a being formed for virtuous action; and naturally leads to the exertion of ſuch qualities as are proper to benefit ſociety, as well as to gain that aſcendancy in it, to which we pretend. It is the ſpring, indeed, of every commendable emulation; puts in act all our better and nobler faculties; and gives nerves to that labour and induſtry, by which every worthy accompliſhment is attained.

But

But now this principle (ſo natural and uſeful), when it is not checked by others, but is ſuffered to take the lead and predominate on all occaſions, undiſciplined and uncontrolled, eaſily grows into a very offenſive and hurtful quality: *offenſive*, becauſe it is now exerted to the humiliation of every other, who is actuated by the ſame principle; and *hurtful*, becauſe, in this undue degree, it counteracts the very purpoſe, *the good of human ſociety*, for which it was deſigned.

This quality we know by the name of PRIDE. The other moderate degree of ſelf-eſteem, which is allowable and virtuous, ſeems not (I ſuppoſe, from its rare appearance under that form) to have acquired in our language a diſtinct name.

To *Pride*, then, the pernicious and too common iſſue of ſelf-love, it became neceſſary, that ſome other principle ſhould be oppoſed. And ſuch a principle, as is proper to correct the malignity of pride, we find in that *philanthropy*, which, by

an inſtinct of the ſame common nature, diſpoſeth us to conſult the happineſs, and to conciliate to ourſelves the good-will and affection, of mankind. This benevolent movement of the mind is, further, quickened by the mutual intereſt all men have in the exerciſe of it. For Pride is diſarmed by ſubmiſſion; and, by receding from our own pretenſions, we take the moſt likely way to moderate thoſe of other men. Thus, the generous affections are kept in play; reciprocal civilities are maintained; and, by the habit of *each preferring other*, which prudence would adviſe, if inſtinct did not inſpire, the peace of ſociety is preſerved, its joy encreaſed, and even our vanity, ſo far as it is a juſt and natural affection, gratified and indulged.

The reaſon of the Apoſtolic precept is, then, laid deep in the conſtitution of human nature; which is ſo wonderfully formed, that its *perfection* requires the reconciliation of contrary qualities; and its

happineſs

happineſs reſults from making benevolence itſelf ſubſervient to ſelf-love.

2. If, from the philoſophic conſideration of man, we turn to the *genius of the Goſpel*, we ſhall there find this concluſion of natural reaſon ſtrengthened and confirmed by evangelical motives.

Benevolence, which, in the Goſpel, takes the name of *Charity*, hath a larger range in this new diſpenſation, than in that of nature. The doctrine, and ſtill more the example, of Jeſus, extends the duty of humility and ſelf-denial; requires us to make ampler ſacrifices of ſelf-love, and to give higher demonſtrations of good-will to others, than mere reaſon could well demand or enforce. He, that was ſo far from *ſeeking his own*, that he *emptied himſelf of all his glory*, and ſtooped from heaven to earth, for the ſake of man, hath a right to expect, from his followers, a more than ordinary effort to conform to ſo divine a precedent, a peculiar attention to the mutual benefits and concerns of each other.

It is but little that we keep within ſome decent bounds our aſpiring tempers and inclinations: we are now to *ſubject* ourſelves to our Chriſtian brethren; to renounce even our innocent and lawful pretenſions; and to forego every natural gratification, when the purpoſes of Chriſtian Charity call us to this arduous taſk.

For the Goſpel, it is to be obſerved, has taken us out of the looſe and general relation of men, and has bound us together in the cloſer and more endearing tie of *Brethren:* it exalts the good-will, we were obliged to bear to the ſpecies, into the affection which conſanguinity inſpires for the individuals of a private family. The Apoſtle, therefore, in the words preceding the text, bids us—*be kindly-affectioned one to another with* BROTHERLY LOVE—not, with the *love*, that unites one *man* with another [c], which is the higheſt pretenſion of mere morality; but with the *love*, that

[c] Φιλανθρωπία.

knits

knits together natural *brethren*[d], which is the proper boaſt and character of evangelical love. The words of the original have a pecular energy[e]. They expreſs that inſtinctive warmth of affection, which nature puts into our hearts for our neareſt kindred, ſuch as communicate with us by the participation of one common blood.

So that the ſame compliances we ſhould make with *their* inclinations, the ſame preference we ſhould give to *their* humour and intereſt above our own, ſhould now be extended and exerciſed towards all Chriſtians; and that principle of an ardent affection, by which we are led to make the moſt chearful condeſcenſions to our *natural* brother, ſhould work in us the ſame generous conſideration of our *ſpiritual* brother, *for whom Chriſt died.*

Having explained the *nature* of this duty, and the *grounds*, both in reaſon

[d] Φιλαδελφία.

[e] Τῇ φιλ. εἰς αλλ. ΦΙΛΟΣΤΟΡΓΟΙ.

and

and religion, on which it reſts, it now remains,

III. To provide for the RIGHT APPLICATION of it in practice. And here, in truth, the whole difficulty lies.

It is evident enough, I ſuppoſe, from what has been ſaid, That the moral and Chriſtian duty of *preferring one another in honour*, reſpects only ſocial peace and charity, and terminates in the good and edification of our Chriſtian brother. Its uſe is, to ſoften the minds of men, and to draw them from that ſavage ruſticity, which engenders many vices, and diſcredits the virtues themſelves. But when men had experienced the benefit of this complying temper, and further ſaw the ends, not of charity only, but of SELF-INTEREST, that might be anſwered by it; they conſidered no longer its juſt purpoſe and application, but ſtretched it to that officious ſedulity, and extreme ſervility of adulation, which

we

we too often obſerve and lament in poliſhed life.

Hence, that infinite attention and conſideration, which is ſo rigidly exacted, and ſo duly paid, in the commerce of the world: hence, that proſtitution of mind, which leaves a man no will, no ſentiment, no principle, no character; all which diſappear under the uniform exhibition of good-manners: hence, thoſe inſidious arts, thoſe ſtudied diſguiſes, thoſe obſequious flatteries, nay, thoſe affected freedoms, in a word, thoſe multiplied and nicely-varied forms of inſinuation and addreſs; the direct aim of which may be to acquire the fame of politeneſs and good-breeding, but the certain effect, to corrupt every virtue, to ſooth every vanity, and to inflame every vice, of the human heart.

Theſe fatal miſchiefs introduce themſelves under the pretence and ſemblance of that *humanity*, which the text encourages and enjoins. But the *genuine* virtue is

eaſily

eaſily diſtinguiſhed from the *counterfeit*, and by the following plain *ſigns*.

1. TRUE POLITENESS is modeſt, unpretending, and generous. It appears as little as may be; and, when it does a courteſy, would willingly conceal it. It chuſes ſilently to forego its own claims, not officiouſly to withdraw them. It engages a man to *prefer his neighbour to himſelf*, becauſe he really eſteems him; becauſe he is tender of his reputation; becauſe he thinks it more manly, more Chriſtian, to deſcend a little himſelf, than to degrade another.—It reſpects, in a word, the *credit and eſtimation* of his neighbour.

The mimic of this amiable virtue, FALSE POLITENESS, is, on the other hand, ambitious, ſervile, timorous. It affects popularity; is ſollicitous to pleaſe, and to be taken notice of. The man of this character does not offer, but obtrude, his civilities: *becauſe* he would merit by

this aſſiduity; becauſe, in deſpair of winning regard by any worthier qualities, he would be ſure to make the moſt of this; and, laſtly, becauſe of all things he would dread, by the omiſſion of any punctilious obſervance, to give offence.—In a word, this ſort of politeneſs, reſpects, for its immediate object, the *favour and conſideration* of our neighbour.

2. Again: the man, who governs himſelf by the *ſpirit* of the Apoſtle's precept, expreſſes his *preference of another* in ſuch a way as is worthy of himſelf: in all innocent compliances, in all honeſt civilities, in all decent and manly condeſcenſions.

On the contrary, the man of the world, who reſts in the *letter* of this command, is regardleſs of the *means*, by which he conducts himſelf. He reſpects neither his own dignity, nor that of human nature. Truth, reaſon, virtue, all are equally betrayed by this ſupple impoſtor. He aſſents to the errors, though the moſt pernicious; he

he applauds the follies, though the moſt ridiculous; he ſooths the vices, though the moſt flagitious, of other men. He never contradicts, though in the ſofteſt form of inſinuation; he never diſapproves, though by a reſpectful ſilence; he never condemns, though it be only by a good example. In ſhort, he is ſollicitous for nothing, but by ſome ſtudied devices to hide from others, and, if poſſible, to palliate to himſelf, the groſſneſs of his illiberal adulation.

3. Laſtly, we may be ſure, that the *ultimate* ENDS, for which theſe different *objects* are purſued, and by ſo different *means*, muſt alſo lie wide of each other.

Accordingly, the truly polite man would, by all proper teſtimonies of reſpect, promote the credit and eſtimation of his neighbour, *becauſe* he ſees, that, by this generous conſideration of each other, the peace of the world is in a good degree preſerved; *becauſe* he knows that theſe mutual

mutual attentions prevent animoſities, ſoften the fierceneſs of mens manners, and diſpoſe them to all the offices of benevolence and charity; *becauſe*, in a word, the intereſts of ſociety are beſt ſerved by this conduct; and *becauſe* he underſtands it to be his duty, *to love his neighbour*.

The falſely polite, on the contrary, are anxious, by all means whatever, to procure the favour and conſideration of thoſe they converſe with, *becauſe* they regard ultimately nothing more than their private intereſt; *becauſe* they perceive, that their own ſelfiſh deſigns are beſt carried on by ſuch practices: in a word, *becauſe* they *love themſelves*.

Thus we ſee, the genuine virtue conſults the honour of others by worthy means, and for the nobleſt purpoſe; the counterfeit, ſollicits their favour by diſhoneſt compliances, and for the baſeſt end.

By ſuch evident marks are theſe two characters diſtinguiſhed from each other!

and ſo impoſſible it is, without a wilful perverſion of our faculties, to miſtake in the application of the Apoſtle's precept!

It follows, you ſee, from what has been ſaid, "that integrity of heart, as Solomon long ſince obſerved, is the beſt guide in morals[f]." We may impoſe upon others by a ſhew of civility; but the deception goes no farther. We cannot help knowing, in our own caſe, if we be ingenuous, when this virtue retains its nature, and when it degenerates into the vice that uſurps its name. To conclude, an honeſt man runs no riſk in being polite. Let us only *reſpect* ourſelves; and we ſhall rarely do amiſs, when, as the Apoſtle adviſes, *in honour we prefer one another.*

[f] *The integrity of the upright ſhall guide them.* Prov. xi. 3.

SER-

SERMON X.

Preached May 6, 1770.

JOHN xiii. 8.

—Jeſus anſwered him, if I waſh thee not, thou haſt no part with me.

TO comprehend the full meaning of theſe words (which, as we ſhall ſee, are of no ſmall importance) we muſt carefully attend to the circumſtances of the hiſtory which gave occaſion to them.

The chapter begins thus—*Now before the feaſt of the Paſſover, when Jeſus knew that his hour was come, that he ſhould depart out of this world to the Father, having*

loved his own, which were in the world, he loved them to the end—

We are prepared by theſe words to expect ſomething, on the part of our Lord, very expreſſive of his love for his Diſciples.

The *ſeaſon*, too, is critical, and muſt excite our attention: *it was before the feaſt of the Paſſover, when Jeſus knew that his hour was come, that he ſhould depart out of this world to the Father*; in other words, juſt before his crucifixion.

There is, indeed, ſome difficulty in fixing the preciſe time, when the tranſaction, now to be related, happened. I take no part in the diſquiſition, becauſe it is not material to my purpoſe, and would divert me too much from it. It is enough to ſay, that it was, at moſt, but the evening before the Paſchal ſupper was celebrated, and therefore but two days before Jeſus ſuffered.

The hiſtory proceeds—"*And ſupper being ended* (or rather, as the text ſhould have been tranſlated, *the time of ſupper*

being come[1]*) the Devil having now put it into the heart of Judas Iſcariot Simon's ſon to betray him, Jeſus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God; he riſeth from ſupper, and laid aſide his garments, and took a towel and girded himſelf. After that, he poureth water into a baſon, and began to waſh the Diſciples feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*

Thus far all is clear. Jeſus condeſcended to *waſh the feet of his Diſciples*; a miniſtry, very common in the Eaſt, and uſually performed by ſervants, in diſcharge of their duty towards their maſters, or, by inferiors, at leaſt, in teſtimony of reſpect towards their ſuperiors; as is abundantly plain from many inſtances.

This then was ONE end of this *waſhing*. Our Saviour meant it as a leſſon of humility and condeſcenſion to his Diſciples.

[1] Δείπνε γενομένε.

But was it the ONLY, or the *chief* end? that is the point, we are now to conſider.

Let it be remembered, then, that nothing was more familiar with the Jews, than to convey an information to others, eſpecially if that information was of importance, by natural, rather than artificial ſigns, I mean by *deeds*, rather than *words*; as every one knows, who has but dipped into the hiſtory and writings of the Old and New Teſtament. The tranſaction before us, if underſtood *only* as a leſſon of humility, is a leſſon conveyed to the Diſciples in this form[*].

Now, this way of *information by action* was occaſionally made to ſerve TWO contrary purpoſes: either, to give more force and emphaſis to an inſtruction; or, to cloathe it with ſome degree of obſcurity, or even ambiguity. For *actions*, ſpeaking to the eye, when the purpoſe of them is

[*] See more on this ſubject in the DISCOURSE *on Chriſt's driving the merchants out of the temple*, at the end of this volume.

by

by any means clearly aſcertained, convey the moſt lively and expreſſive information: on the other hand, when it is not, they are ſomewhat obſcure, one thing being to be collected by us from another; or the information may even be ambiguous, as the action may ſignify more things than one.

Sometimes, the primary ſenſe is declared, or eaſily underſtood; while, yet, a ſecondary ſenſe, a leſs apparent one, but more momentous, is, alſo, intended.

This, upon inquiry, may be the caſe before us. Chriſt's *waſhing the feet of his Diſciples* obviouſly conveys this inſtruction, which is aſſerted, too, in expreſs words—that, *as he their lord and maſter, waſhed their feet, ſo they ought alſo to waſh one another's feet* [a]. But *another*, and far more important, inſtruction *may* be conveyed in this action, though it be not ſo fully and explicitly declared. It *may*, I ſay, be conveyed: from laying all circum-

[a] Ver. 14.

ſtances together, we ſhall be able to form a judgement, whether it were, indeed, in the Agent's *intention* to convey it.

Firſt, as I ſaid, the narrative of this tranſaction (which, take it as you will, was clearly deſigned to be an *information by action)* is prefaced in a very extraordinary manner. *Jeſus, knowing that his hour was come—knowing too that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God*, proceeded—to do what? Why, to give his diſciples a leſſon of humility and charity, in waſhing their feet. The Leſſon, no doubt, was important; and becoming the character of their divine maſter. But does it riſe up to thoſe *ideas* of importance, which we are prepared to entertain of an action, performed at ſuch a time, and ſo awfully introduced? *His hour was come—the Father had given all things into his hands—he came from God, and was now going to God.* All this announces ſomething beyond and above a

common lecture of morality; ſomething, which might be a ſuitable cloſe to the inſtructions of ſuch a teacher.

Let us ſee, *next*, how the action is received. One of the diſciples, Peter, ſurprized at his Lord's condeſcenſion, ſays very naturally, *Lord, Doſt thou waſh my feet?* Jeſus, to remove his ſcruples, replies, *What I do, thou knoweſt not now, but thou ſhalt know hereafter.* The words are ambiguous, and may mean, "Thou ſhalt know, *immediately*, from the explication I am about to give of this action;" or, "thou ſhalt know *hereafter*, in due time, and by other means," What the purport of it is. Still, Peter, not ſatisfied with this anſwer, but confounded at the apparent indignity of Chriſt's condeſcenſion, replies reſolutely, *Thou ſhalt never waſh my feet.* This reſiſtance was to be overcome, that the *information*, whatever it was, might take place, by the performance of that which was the vehicle of it. Jeſus anſwers, therefore, more directly and ſolemnly,

lemnly, IF I WASH THEE NOT, THOU HAST NO PART WITH ME—Which words, whether underſtood by Peter or not, were clearly ſeen to have *ſome* meaning of the laſt concern to him; and ſtruck with this apprehenſion, he ſubmits.

But what! taking theſe oracular words, in the ſenſe only in which Jeſus thought fit to explain them, we hardly ſee the force and propriety of them. For, had Peter *no part with Jeſus*, that is, was he incapable of receiving any benefit from him, unleſs he had this ceremony of waſhing, performed upon him, when that ceremony had no further uſe or meaning, than to convey a moral leſſon? If he had not learnt *this* leſſon from Chriſt, he might have learnt many *others*: or, he might have learnt *this*, ſome other way: and, taking it in either light, he might ſtill be ſaid to *have ſome part* with Jeſus, though he had not been *waſhed* by him.

The true import, then, of theſe enigmatic words, and of the whole tranſaction which

which is here recorded, begins to appear, and is further opened by the ſequel of Peter's converſation with Jeſus. For, underſtanding, that this *ablution* was, ſome way, ſo neceſſary to him, Peter ſubjoins, *Not my feet only, but alſo my hands and my head.* Jeſus ſaith to him, *He that is waſhed, needeth not, ſave to waſh his feet, and is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all; for he knew who ſhould betray him; therefore ſaid he, Ye are not all clean.*

It was, we ſee, the uncleanneſs of ſin, or *the filth of an evil conſcience*, which was to be taken away by this waſhing. More than a ſingle moral leſſon, how excellent ſoever, was, therefore, couched in this act: indeed, the neceſſity and efficacy of CERTAIN MEANS, by which mankind were, in general, to be cleanſed from ſin, was that which was ultimately and mainly ſignified by it. He that was *thus waſhed, was clean every whit*; and the *information* of this benefit being the end of the waſhing,

ing, it was enough if that was conveyed by waſhing any one part.

You ſee at length to what all this tends. Jeſus, knowing the ſecret treachery of Judas, and, by the divine Spirit which was in him, foreſeeing the deſtined effect of that treachery; knowing, that he was now, forthwith, to ſuffer death upon the croſs, the purpoſe, for which he came from God, and for the execution of which he only waited before he returned to him; conſidering, withal, the immenſe benefit, which was to accrue to mankind from his voluntary devotion of himſelf to this death, and that the eternal Father, for the ſake of it, *had given all things into his hands*, had given him the power to redeem all the Sons of Adam from the vaſſalage of ſin and death, by virtue of that BLOOD which he was now to pour out upon the croſs, as a propitiation for them; Jeſus, I ſay, foreſeeing and conſidering all this, choſe this critical ſeaſon, when *his hour was now come*, to ſignify by the ceremony of waſhing

waſhing his diſciples feet[a], the efficacy and value of his own precious blood, by which alone they, and all mankind, were to have all their ſins purged and waſhed away for ever.

This was apparently the momentous inſtruction, which it was our Lord's purpoſe to convey in this tranſaction. He would, *firſt*, ſhew that we were to be waſhed in his blood; and *then*, ſubordinately, that we were to follow his example in a readineſs *to do as he had done*; that is, not only to *waſh* each other, but, emblematically ſtill, to lay down our lives and pour out our blood, if need be, for the ſake of the brethren. All circumſtances concur to aſſure us, that ſuch was the real ſecret intent of this myſterious waſhing; and thus, at length, we underſtand the full purport

[a] If it be aſked, why their *feet*? the anſwer is, that it was cuſtomary in the eaſt for one to waſh the feet of another. And this practice gave an eaſy introduction to the preſent enigmatical waſhing; which was equally expreſſive of the information deſigned, when performed on this part of the body, as on any other.

of

of thoſe words—*If I waſh thee not, thou haſt no part with me* [b].

If it be ſtill ſaid, that Jeſus explains his own purpoſe differently, it is enough to reply, that theſe emblematic actions were generally ſignificative of more things, than one; and that the manner of Jeſus

[b] Grotius ſaw the neceſſity of looking beyond the literal meaning of thoſe words—*if I waſh thee not*. "Mos Chriſti, ſays he, eſt a rebus, quæ adſpiciuntur, ad ſenſum ſublimiorem aſcendere." His comment then follows. "*Niſi te lavero*, id eſt, niſi *et ſermone et ſpiritu eluero* quod in te reſtat minus puri," &c. Conſidering how near Jeſus was to his crucifixion, when he ſaid this, one a little wonders how the great commentator, when he was to aſſign the myſtical ſenſe of theſe words, ſhould overlook that which lay before him. Surely his gloſs ſhould have been, *Niſi ſanguine meo te eluero*, &c.—Let me juſt add, that the force of theſe words, as addreſſed to Peter, will be perfectly underſtood, if we reflect that he, who ſaid to Jeſus—*Thou ſhalt never waſh my feet*—ſaid on a former occaſion to him, when he ſpoke, without a figure, of his *death* (though not, then, under the idea of a propitiatory ſacrifice, or ablution)—*Be it far from thee, Lord; this ſhall not be unto thee.* [Matt. xvi, 22.] So little did Peter ſee the neceſſity of being *waſhed* by the blood of Chriſt! And ſo important was the information now given him in this *myſtical* waſhing—*If I waſh thee not, thou haſt no part with me.*

was,

was, on other occaſions, to enforce that inſtruction, which was not the primary one in his intention [c]: the reaſon of which conduct was founded in this rule, ſo conſtantly obſerved by him, of conveying information to his diſciples, only, *as they were able to bear it* [d]. In a word, he gave them many inſtructions, and *this*, among the reſt, darkly and imperfectly, becauſe they could not then bear a ſtronger light; but yet with ſuch clearneſs as might, afterwards, let them into his purpoſe: leaving it to the Holy Ghoſt (whoſe peculiar province it was) to illuminate their minds, in due time; to reveal all that had been obſcurely intimated; and to open the full meaning of his diſcourſes and actions, as well as to *bring them all to their remembrance* [e].

From this memorable part of the Goſpel-hiſtory, thus opened and explained,

[c] A remarkable inſtance will be given, in the Diſcourſe, referred to above, at the cloſe of this volume.

[d] Mark iv. 33. John xvi. 12.

[e] John xiv. 26.

we

we may draw ſome important concluſions.

1. FIRST, we learn, if the comment here given be a juſt one, That *the blood of Chriſt* (ſo an Apoſtle has expreſſed himſelf) *cleanſeth us from all ſin*[f]: I mean, that the death of Chriſt was a true, proper, and real propitiation for our ſins; and not a mere figure, or tropical form of ſpeech; as too many, who call themſelves Chriſtians, conceive of it. For the pertinence and propriety of the repreſentative action, performed by our Lord, is founded in this ſuppoſition, "That the blood of Chriſt was neceſſary to our purification, and that, but for our being *waſhed in his blood*[g], we ſhould be yet in our ſins." Jeſus himſelf, in explaining this tranſaction, ſo far as he thought fit to explain it, confines us to this idea. For in this ſenſe, only, is it true—*that we, who are waſhed, are clean every whit*—and, that

[f] 1 John i. 7.
[g] Rev. i. 5.

unleſs

unleſs we are waſhed by Chriſt, we have no part with him.

Such, then, is the information given us in this ceremony of *waſhing the diſciples feet*; and not in this, only. For, beſides the preſent emblematic act, performed by our Lord, for the ſpecial benefit of his diſciples, the TWO Sacraments, it is to be obſerved, were purpoſely inſtituted, for the general uſe of his church, to hold forth to us an image of his *efficacious blood*, poured out for us: the ſacrament of BAPTISM, by the reference it had (like this act) to the typical *waſhings* of the Law; and the ſacrament of the LORD'S SUPPER, as referring, in like manner, to the typical *ſacrifices* of that diſpenſation. Of ſuch moment, in the view of our Lord himſelf, was this doctrine of *propitiation!* And ſo careful, or rather anxious, was he, that this conſolatory idea of *redemption through his* BLOOD [h] (ſuggeſted in ſo many ways, and in ſo ſtriking a manner) ſhould be always preſent to us!

[h] Eph. i. 7. Ccloſſ. i. 14.

Nor

Nor were his Apoſtles (let me, further, remark) leſs intent in proſecuting this deſign. For they inſiſt everywhere, and with a ſingular emphaſis—that *Chriſt, our paſſover, is ſacrificed for us*[i]—and that *we are* WASHED, *and ſanctified, and ſaved, by the ſprinkling of the blood of Jeſus*[k].

Go now, then, and ſay, that the *blood* of Chriſt is only a metaphor, and means no more in the mouth of a Chriſtian, than it might be ſuppoſed to do in that of an honeſt heathen, who ſhould ſay, That he had been *ſaved*, or benefited in a moral way, by the *blood*, that is, the exemplary death, of Socrates!—When we ſpeak of its *waſhing* away ſin, it is true, we uſe the term, *waſhing*, metaphorically (for *ſin* is not literally waſhed): but the ſcriptures are unintelligible, and language itſelf has no meaning, if *the blood of the lamb ſlain* had not a true, direct, and proper efficacy (conſidered in the literal ſenſe

[i] 1 Cor. v. 7.

[k] 1 Pet. i. 12. 1 Cor. vi. 11. and elſewhere, *paſſim*.

of *blood)* in freeing us from the *guilt* of ſin, or, in other words, from the *puniſhment* of it.

2. A SECOND concluſion may be drawn, more particularly, from the words of the text—*if I waſh thee not, thou haſt no part with me.* For, if theſe words mean, as I have endeavoured to ſhew, and as, I think, they muſt mean, that we are redeemed only by the *blood* of Chriſt; and if, as the context ſeems to ſpeak, it is in our power to forfeit this benefit, by refuſing to be *waſhed* by his blood, that is, to accept the deliverance, offered to us, *through faith in his blood*[1]: it follows, that there is ſomething very alarming in the condition of thoſe perſons, who hold out againſt all the calls of Grace, and obſtinately perſiſt in a ſtate of infidelity. In vain have they recourſe to natural religion, or to any other ſuppoſed means of purification and ſalvation. In vain do they truſt even to the moral part of the

[1] Rom. iii. 25.

Goſpel, while they reject, or diſbelieve the reſt. They muſt be waſhed by *Chriſt*, if they deſire *to have any part with him*; they muſt place their entire hope and confidence in the *blood* of the covenant, who would ſhare in the bleſſings of it.

Nay, more than this: the Redeemer is *outraged* by this refuſal to comply with the gracious terms of his ſalvation. And, though ſome may make ſlight of *having no part with Chriſt*, it may concern them to reflect, what it is to *have a portion with unbelievers* [m].

3. LASTLY, and above all, I conclude, that they, who are *waſhed*, and, in conſequence of that waſhing, truſt to *have a part with Chriſt*, as they can never be enough thankful for the ineſtimable benefit, they have received, ſo they can never be enough careful to retain, and to improve it. If we, who have once embraced the faith, revolt from it; or, while we make a ſhew of profeſſing the faith,

[m] Luke xii. 46.

pollute ourſelves again with thoſe ſins, from which we have been cleanſed; nay, if we do not ſtrive to purify our hearts and minds ſtill more and more by the continual efficacy of a lively faith in Jeſus; if, in any of theſe ways, we be in the number of thoſe, *who draw back unto perdition*, what further ſacrifice remains for us, or what hope have we in that, which has been already offered?

Judas himſelf, be it remembered, was *waſhed* among the other Diſciples; yet he was not *clean*, for all that, nor had he *any part* with Jeſus. What can this mean, but that ſomething is to be done, on *our* part, when the Redeemer has done *his?* and that the permanent effect of this *waſhing*, as to any particular perſon, depends on his care to keep thoſe *robes white*, which have been *waſhed in the blood of the lamb*[n]*?*

The account, and the concluſion, of the whole matter, is plainly this—*If we*

[n] Rev. vii. 14.

ſay that we have fellowſhip with him, and walk in darkneſs, we lie, and do not the truth: but, if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, then *have we fellowſhip with him, and* HIS BLOOD CLEANSETH US FROM ALL SIN [c].

[c] 1 John vi. 7.

SER-

SERMON XI.

Preached June 20, 1773.

MARK ix. 49.

For every one ſhall be ſalted with fire, and every ſacrifice ſhall be ſalted with ſalt.

THIS is generally eſteemed one of the moſt difficult paſſages in the four Goſpels. I confeſs, I take no pleaſure in commenting on ſuch paſſages, eſpecially in this place; becauſe the comment only ſerves, for the moſt part, to gratify a learned curioſity, and is, otherwiſe, of ſmall uſe.

But, when a difficult text of Scripture can be explained, and the ſenſe, ariſing

out of the explanation, is edifying and important, then it falls properly within our province to exert our beſt pains upon it.

This I take to be the caſe of the difficulty before us, which therefore I ſhall beg leave to make the ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe.

There are TWO very different interpretations, of which the words are capable: and they ſhall both of them be laid before you, that ye may adopt either, as ye think fit; or even reject them both, if you do not find them ſufficiently ſupported.

To enable you to go along with me in what follows, and to judge of either interpretation, whether it be reaſonable or not, it is neceſſary to call your attention to the preceding verſes of this chapter, to which the text refers, and by which it is introduced.

Our bleſſed Lord (for the words, I am about to explain, are *his*) had been diſcourſing

courſing to his Diſciples on *offences*, or *ſcandals*; that is, ſuch inſtances of ill conduct, ſuch indulgences of any favourite and vicious inclination, as tended to obſtruct the progreſs of the Goſpel, and were likely to prevent either themſelves, or others, from embracing, or holding faſt, the faith. Such offences, it was foreſeen, would come: *but woe to that man* (as we read in the parallel paſſage of St. Matthew's Goſpel) *by whom the offence cometh* [p].

And, to give the greater effect to this ſalutary denunciation, our Saviour proceeds, in figurative, indeed, but very intelligible terms, to enforce the neceſſity of being on our guard againſt ſuch *offences*, what pain ſoever it might coſt us to ſubdue thoſe paſſions, from which they were ready to ſpring. No virtue of ſelf-denial was too great to be attempted in ſuch a cauſe. A *hand*, a *foot*, an *eye*, were to be *cut off*, or *plucked out*; that is, inclinations,

[p] Matt. xviii. 7.

as neceſſary and as dear to us, as thoſe members of the body, were to be ſuppreſſed or rejected by us, rather than the *woe*, denounced againſt the indulgence of them, be incurred. This woe is, that the offenders ſhould be caſt into hell-fire, *where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched:* and it is ſubjoined *three times*, in the ſame awful words, to ſo many inſtances of ſuppoſed criminal indulgence, in the caſe alledged; or rather, to one and the *ſame* ſpecies of ill-conduct, differently modified, and, to make the greater impreſſion upon us, repreſented under three diſtinct images. After the laſt repetition of it, the text immediately follows—*for every one ſhall be ſalted with fire, and every ſacrifice ſhall be ſalted with ſalt.*

I. Now, taken in this connection, the words *may* clearly, and, according to our ideas of interpretation, moſt naturally *do*, admit this ſenſe; that the offenders, ſpoken of, ſhall be preſerved entire to ſuffer the puniſh-

puniſhment threatened, though it might ſeem that they would, in no long time, be totally deſtroyed by it: as if our Lord had expreſſed himſelf thus—" I have repeated this woe three times to ſhew you the degree and duration of it, as well as the certainty of its execution: *the worm ſhall not die*, that is, the ſenſe of ſuffering ſhall continue, even in circumſtances, which may ſeem proper and likely to put an end to it: for ſuch, as are worthy to be caſt into this fire, ſhall be *ſalted*, or preſerved from waſting (ſalt being the known emblem of *incorruption*, and thence of *perpetuity*) by the very fire itſelf. And [you may eaſily conceive how this ſhall be, *for*] *every ſacrifice*, the fleſh of every animal to be offered up to God in your Jewiſh ſacrifices, is kept ſound and fit for uſe by being (as the Law directs in that caſe) *ſalted with ſalt*. Juſt ſo, the *fire itſelf* ſhall act on theſe victims of the divine juſtice: like *ſalt*, ſprinkled on your legal victims, it ſhall preſerve theſe offenders

offenders entire, and in a perpetual capacity of ſubſiſting to that uſe, to which they are deſtined."

Now, if ſuch be the ſenſe of the words, they contain the fulleſt and moſt deciſive proof of that tremendous doctrine, *the eternity of future puniſhments*, which is any where to be met with in Scripture. For the words, being given as a reaſon and explanation of the doctrine, are not ſuſceptible of any vague interpretation, like the words, *eternal*, or *everlaſting*, in which it is uſually expreſſed; but muſt neceſſarily be underſtood, as implying and affirming the literal truth of the thing, for which they would account. And, this being ſuppoſed, you ſee the uſe, the unſpeakable importance, of this text, as addreſſed to all believers in Jeſus. But,

II. There is *another* ſenſe, of which the text is capable: and, if you think it not allowable to deduce a concluſion of ſuch dreadful import from words of an ambiguous ſignification, you will incline perhaps (as

(as it is natural for us to do) to this more favourable interpretation, which I am going to propoſe.

I obſerved, that the text, as read in connection with the preceding verſe, is moſt naturally, according to our ideas of interpretation, to be underſtood, as I have already explained it. But, what is the moſt *natural*, according to our modern rules and principles of conſtruction, is not always the *true*, ſenſe of paſſages in antient oriental writers (who did not affect our accuracy of connection), and particularly in the writers of the New Teſtament.

To give a remarkable inſtance in a diſcourſe of our Lord himſelf. He had preſcribed to his diſciples that form of prayer, which we know by the name of the *Lord's prayer*, conſiſting of ſeveral articles; the laſt of which is—*for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever*[q]. Now, to this concluding ſentence of his prayer he immediately ſubjoins theſe

[q] Matt. vi.

words

words—FOR *if we forgive men their treſpaſſes, your heavenly Father will alſo forgive you.* But, from the illative particle, *for*, according to our notions of exact compoſition, was to be expected a reaſon, or illuſtration, of the *immediately foregoing* clauſe, the *doxology*, which ſhuts up this prayer: whereas, the words, which that particle introduces, have reſpect to another and *remote* clauſe in the ſame prayer, namely, *forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*[r], and expreſs the ground and reaſon, only, of that petition.

In like manner, the illation expreſſed in the text—FOR *every one ſhall be ſalted with fire, and every ſacrifice ſhall be ſalted with ſalt*—may not be intended to reſpect the preceding words—*where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*—but ſomething elſe, which had been advanced in our Lord's diſcourſe, though at ſome diſtance from the text; and poſſibly, the general ſcope or *ſubject* of it. Conſider, then,

[r] Ver. 12.

what

what that ſubject is. It is neceſſary, our Lord tells his diſciples, for ſuch as would eſcape the woes, threatened, and approve themſelves faithful followers of him, to ſubdue or renounce their moſt favourite inclinations, by which they might be, at any time, tempted to *offend*, though the pain of this ſelf-denial ſhould be ever ſo grievous to them.

To reconcile their minds to this harſh doctrine, he may then be ſuppoſed to reſume that topic, and to *juſtify* the advice, which, with ſo much apparent ſeverity, he had given them. And then we may conceive him to ſpeak to this effect:

"I have ſaid, you muſt not regard the *uneaſineſs*, which the conduct, I require of you, will probably occaſion. For *every one*, that is, every true Chriſtian, *every one*, that is conſecrated to my ſervice, and would eſcape the puniſhment by *fire*, in the world to come, *ſhall be ſalted with fire*, in the preſent world; that is, ſhall be tried with ſufferings of one kind or other,

can

can only expect to be continued in a ſound and uncorrupt ſtate, by *afflictions*; which muſt ſearch, cleanſe, and purify your lives and minds, juſt as *fire* does thoſe bodies, which it refines, by conſuming all the droſs and refuſe, contained in them. The proceſs may be violent, but the end is moſt deſirable and even neceſſary. *And*, that it is ſo, ye may diſcern from the wiſdom of your own Law, which requires that *every ſacrifice*, fit to be offered up to God in the temple-ſervice, *ſhall be ſalted with ſalt*; that is, preſerved from putrefaction, and even all approaches to it, by the application of that uſeful, though corroding ſubſtance. Now, the *fire* of affliction ſhall be to your moral natures, what *ſalt* is to the animal. It may agitate and torment your minds, but it ſhall eat all the principles of corruption out of them, and ſo keep them clean and untainted; as is fit, conſidering the heavenly uſe that is to be made of them, it being your duty and even intereſt to preſent them, as *a ſacrifice*

ſacrifice acceptable and well-pleaſing to God[s]."

In this way, you ſee, the text is reaſonably explained of *moral diſcipline* in this world, not of future *puniſhment*. What may be thought to occaſion ſome little difficulty, or, at leaſt, particularity, in the mode of writing, is, that *one* metaphor, ſeems here employed to explain *another*. But we ſhould rather conceive of the two metaphors, as employed, jointly and ſeverally, to expreſs this moral ſentiment—'That affliction contributes to preſerve and improve our virtue.' The alluſion to the effects of *ſalt* was exceedingly obvious and natural in the mouth of a Jew, addreſſing himſelf to Jews[t]. Not but it was common enough, too, in Gentile writers[u]. And the other alluſion to the effects of *fire* (though the two figures are in a manner run together by ſpeaking of the *ſubject*, to which they are applied, as *ſalted*

[s] Phil. iv. 18.
[t] See Whitby in loc.
[u] See paſſages cited by Dr. Hammond.

with

with fire). This alluſion, I ſay, to *fire*, is juſtified by the familiar uſe of it, in the ſacred writings. For thus we are told, *that fire muſt try every man's work*[a]—that *our faith is tried, as gold by fire*[b]—that *a fiery trial muſt try us*[c]—that, *as gold is tried in the fire*, ſo are *acceptable men in the furnace of adverſity*[d]—and in other inſtances.

Of *both* theſe natural images, it may be affirmed, that they are not unuſually applied to moral ſubjects: and, if we thus *apply* them in the text, the *uſe* to ourſelves, according to this interpretation, is conſiderable and even important; no leſs, than the ſeeing enforced, in the moſt lively manner, and by our Saviour himſelf, this great moral and evangelical leſſon—*that the virtue of a good mind muſt be maintained at whatever expence of trouble and ſelf-denial*—and for this plain reaſon, becauſe,

[a] 1 Cor. iii. 13.
[b] 1 Pet. i. 7.
[c] 1 Pet. iv. 12.
[d] Eccleſ. ii. 5.

though

though *no chaſtening for the preſent ſeem to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheleſs, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteouſneſs unto them, which are exerciſed thereby* [e].

And, that ſuch is probably the true ſenſe of the text, we have been conſidering, may further be concluded from the light it throws on the following and laſt verſe of this chapter; the meaning of which will now be very plain and conſequential, as may be ſhewn in few words.

For, having ſpoken of *Chriſtian diſcipline* under the name of *ſalt*, which *preſerves* what it ſearches, our Lord very naturally takes advantage of this idea, and transfers the appellation to *Chriſtian faith*, which was neceſſary to ſupport his followers under that diſcipline, and has this property, in common with *ſalt*, that it gives ſoundneſs and incorruption to the ſubject on which it operates. *Salt*, ſays he, *is good: but, if ſalt have loſt its ſalt-*

[e] Heb. xii. 1.

neſs, wherewith will ye ſeaſon it? That is, *faith in me* (for by *ſalt*, you eaſily perceive, I now mean that faith, which is your true *ſeaſoning*, and can alone maintain your firmneſs and integrity under all trials; this *faith*, I ſay) is a ſalutary principle: but take notice, if you ſuffer that principle, ſo active and efficacious, to decay and loſe its virtue, there are no means left to retrieve it. Like *ſalt*, grown inſipid, it can never recover its former quality, but is for ever worthleſs and uſeleſs [f]. Therefore, adds he, take care to *have*, that is, retain, this *ſalt*, this good ſeaſoning of your Chriſtian principles, *in yourſelves*; which will preſerve you incorrupt, as *individuals*: and, as *ſalt*, from its neceſſary uſe at the table, is further an emblem of union and friendſhip, give proof of theſe principles in your intercourſe with all Chriſtians, ſo as to keep *peace one with another*; for, by this *ſea-*

[f] Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.

ſoning

ſoning of peace, ye will beſt preſerve yourſelves entire, as *a body of men*, or ſociety [g].

We ſee, then, that underſtanding this *fire*, with which *every one ſhall be ſalted*, of the fire of *affliction* only, which, like ſalt, is to try and preſerve the moral integrity of all believers, and not of the *fire*, *which dieth not*, and, according to the former interpretation, was to preſerve *offenders* in a perpetual capacity of enduring future puniſhment; underſtanding, I ſay, this metaphor in the former ſenſe, we have an eaſy, elegant, and ex-

[g] The difficulty in the two concluding verſes of this chapter, ariſes from a *vivacity of imagination in the purſuit and application of metaphors*; a faculty, in which the orientals excelled, and delighted. They paſs ſuddenly from one idea to another, nearly, and ſometimes, remotely, allied to it. They relinquiſh the primary ſenſe, for another ſuggeſted by it; and without giving any notice, as we ſhould do, of their intention. Theſe numerous *reflected lights*, as we may call them, eagerly catched at by the mind in its train of thinking, perplex the attention of a modern reader, and muſt be carefully ſeparated by him, if he would ſee the whole ſcope and purpoſe of many paſſages in the ſacred writings.

tremely uſeful ſenſe in the words of the text; a ſenſe, which perfectly agrees with what precedes the text, and illuſtrates what follows it: whereas, in the other way of explaining theſe words, it will be difficult to ſhew their coherence with the ſubſequent verſe, though they admit an application to the foregoing.

On the whole, I leave it to yourſelves to judge, which of the two interpretations, now propoſed to you, is the proper one. I know of no other, that ſo well deſerves your notice, as theſe two: and, if *either* of them be admiſſible, we have gained the ſatisfaction of underſtanding a very obſcure paſſage of holy Scripture. But we have gained more, than this: for, whichever we prefer, a momentous inference may be drawn from it. EITHER, we muſt reſolve to ſtick cloſe to our CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRINCIPLES, as the only means of preſerving our integrity, and making us fit for the favour

of

of God, to whatever trials of any kind they may expoſe us: or, we ſhall have to reflect, what SUFFERING, terrible beyond imagination, is reſerved for obſtinately impenitent and incorrigible ſinners.

SERMON XII.

Preached Feb. 9, 1766.

GAL. vi. 3.

If a man think himſelf to be ſomething, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himſelf.

THIS is one of thoſe many paſſages in the ſacred writings, in which the ſimplicity of the expreſſion is apt to make us overlook the profound ſenſe contained under it. Who doubts, it may be ſaid, the truth of ſo general an axiom, as this? and what information, worth treaſuring up in the memory, is conveyed by it?

In anſwer to ſuch queſtions, as theſe, it may be obſerved, That the inſpired writers are not ſingular in this practice; the

moral wiſdom of all nations, and, in particular, that of the antient Pagan ſages (whom theſe objectors, no doubt, reverence) being uſually conveyed in ſuch large and general aphoriſms: and, further, that many good reaſons may be given for this mode of inſtruction.

FIRST, *the neceſſity of the thing*, in times, when men have not been accuſtomed to refine on moral ſubjects: it is alſo *neceſſary* in another ſenſe, in order to convey the rules of life in ſome reaſonable compaſs. Good ſenſe in moral matters is but the experience of obſerving men, the reſult of which muſt be given in compendious parcels or collections; otherwiſe the memory is loaded too much; beſides that neither the leiſure, nor the talents of thoſe, for whom theſe leſſons are deſigned, will ſerve for nicer diſquiſitions.

SECONDLY, if this *mode* of teaching were not neceſſary, it would ſtill be preferable to any other for its *own proper dignity*. A philoſopher in the ſchools, or a Divine in

in his cloſet, may deduce the laws of morality with a minute exactneſs. But the authority of an Apoſtle diſdains this care, and awakens the conſciences of men by ſome *general* precept, by ſome large and *comprehenſive* obſervation. It becomes the majeſty of his character to deliver the principles of right conduct in *few and weighty words*: his precepts are *Laws*; and his obſervations, *Oracles*: it is for others to ſpeculate upon them with curioſity, and draw them out into ſyſtems.

THIRDLY, ſometimes the very addreſs of a writer leads him to *generalize* his obſervations. It is, when a more direct and pointed manner would preſs too cloſely on the mind, and, by making the application neceſſary, indiſpoſe us to conviction; whereas, when a reproof preſents itſelf in this form, leſs offence is likely to be given by it, the application being left, in a good degree, to ourſelves.

This laſt, we ſhall find, was the caſe of St. Paul in the text; in whoſe behalf,

therefore, we need not, in the preſent inſtance, plead the *neceſſity*, the *convenience*, or the *dignity* of this method of inſtruction; though theſe reaſons, we ſee, might, on other occaſions, be very juſtly alledged.

For, to come now to the aphoriſm in the text—*If a man think himſelf to be ſomething, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himſelf*—as trivial as this general truth may appear at firſt ſight, we ſhall perceive, by turning to the context, that the inſpired writer applies it with infinite addreſs to mortify the pride of ſome perſons, againſt whom the tenour of his diſcourſe is there directed. For certain falſe teachers, it ſeems, had very early crept into the churches of *Galatia*, who arrogated a ſuperior wiſdom to themſelves, and, on the credit of this claim, preſumed to impoſe the yoke of Jewiſh ordinances on the Gentile converts: in direct oppoſition to the injunctions of the Apoſtle, who had lately planted thoſe churches; and in manifeſt violation of Chriſtian charity, which forbad

forbad thoſe grievous burthens to be laid on the conſciences of believers.

One natural feature in the character of theſe vain-glorious boaſters, was, the contempt with which they treated the more infirm Chriſtians, and the little conſideration they had for ſuch of their brethren, as happened to be *overtaken with any fault*. This proud, unchriſtian temper he therefore takes upon him to correct—*Brethren*, ſays he, *if any man be overtaken with a fault, you, that are ſpiritual, reſtore ſuch a one in the ſpirit of meekneſs, conſidering thyſelf, leſt thou alſo be tempted: Bear ye one another's burdens, and ſo fullfil the law of Chriſt.* And then follows the obſervation of the text—*for, if a man think himſelf to be ſomething, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himſelf:* leaving the conceited Doctors and their admirers to apply theſe general words, as they ſaw fit; but clearly enough pointing to ſome perſons among them, *who took themſelves to be ſomething*, and yet miſerably *deceived themſelves*, in that, in-

deed, they *were nothing*. In what reſpects their conduct ſhewed them to be ſo, he leaves to their own ſagacity, quickened by the poignancy of this covert reproof, to find out.

Such is the Apoſtle's *addreſs* in this divine admonition; and ſuch the *force* (the greater, *for* the addreſs) of the reprehenſion conveyed in it!

But, now, what thoſe RESPECTS are, in which theſe ſufficient men ſhewed themſelves *to be nothing*, though St. Paul thought it not fit to ſpecify them to the *Galatians*, it may be *uſeful* to *us*, as it certainly is left *free* for us, to inquire.

FIRST, then, their very *Conceit* was a certain argument of their *Folly*. For, what ſurer indication of a weak and ſhallow man, than his proneneſs to think highly of himſelf! Wiſe men underſtand themſelves at another rate. They are too conſcious of their own infirmities; they know their judgement to be too fallible, their apprehenſion too ſlow, their knowledge

ledge too ſcanty, their wills too feeble, and their paſſions too ſtrong, to give way to this inſolent exultation of heart, to indulge in this conceit of their own importance, and much leſs to form injurious compariſons between themſelves and others. They underſtand, that the only queſtion is concerning the different degrees of *weakneſs and imperfection*; and that, where the beſt come far ſhort of what they ſhould be, all pretence of boaſting is cut off.

SECONDLY, theſe ſuperior airs of importance were unſuitable to the nature of their religion, and ſhewed how little proficiency they had made in it; BECAUSE, as *Chriſtians*, whatever light and knowledge they laid claim to, they muſt needs confeſs was not their own, but derived to them from above. All, theſe ſpiritual men could pretend to know of divine things, had been freely and ſolely revealed to them by the ſpirit of God; a diſtinction, which ought indeed to fill their hearts with grati-

tude, but could be no proper foundation of their pride or vain-glory. For, as the Apoſtle himſelf argues in another place, *Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what haſt thou, which thou didſt not receive? Now, if thou didſt receive it, why doſt thou glory, as if thou hadſt not received it* [a]?

Whatever temptation, therefore, there might be to a poor vain heathen to pride himſelf in his pittance of knowledge or virtue, a CHRISTIAN ſhould, by the very principles of his religion, be more modeſt, and aſcribe his proficiency in either, not to himſelf, but to the indulgent favour and good pleaſure of God.

THIRDLY, theſe Boaſters betrayed themſelves by the *fruits*, which this ſelf-importance produced, namely, their contemptuous and unfeeling treatment of their brethren under any inſtance of their weakneſs and frailty. Such behaviour was doubly ridiculous: *firſt*, as it implied an ignorance of their own infirmity, and lia-

[a] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

bleneſs to temptation; and, *then*, as it argued a total want of *Charity*, the moſt eſſential part of their religion, without which a man *is nothing*, whatever gifts and graces of other kinds he may poſſeſs [b].

FOURTHLY, whatever *merit* a man may poſſeſs, this fond complacency of mind can hardly fail to *deprive* him of it. For this conceit of his own ſufficiency puts him off his guard, and makes him more liable to fall into any *miſconduct*, when, apprehending no danger to himſelf, he employs no care; juſt as nothing is more fatal to an army, than a confidence in its own ſtrength, inducing a neglect of that watchfulneſs and diſcipline, by which alone its ſecurity can be maintained.

This ſufficiency alſo leads to *ignorance*, as well as miſconduct, by cutting off all hopes of further improvement. For he, that is proud of his own knowledge, is not anxious to extend it; and, indeed, does not eaſily apprehend there is much room or occaſion for his ſo doing. Now, from the

[b] 1 Cor. xiii.

moment a man ſtands ſtill, and interrupts his intellectual, as well as moral courſe, by the known conſtitution of things, he neceſſarily goes backward; and, for his juſt puniſhment, relapſes faſt into that ignorance, in a freedom from which he had before placed his confidence and triumph.

Laſtly, this preſumptuous conceit is *belyed* in the EVENT, I mean in the opinion of thoſe very perſons, to whom the vain man would willingly recommend himſelf. For the natural effect of ſuch preſumption is, to excite the *contempt* of the wiſe, and the *envy* of the reſt. Men of diſcernment eaſily penetrate the deluſion, and, knowing how little reaſon there is for any man to pride himſelf in his knowledge or virtue, are provoked to entertain an oſtentatious diſplay of thoſe qualities with that ridicule, it ſo well deſerves: while the weaker ſort always take themſelves to be inſulted by ſuperior accompliſhments; and rarely wait the juſt provocation of *vain-glory* to malign and envy thoſe, to whom they belong.

But

But the misfortune does not ſtop here. Contempt and Envy are active and vigilant paſſions; they are quick at eſpying a weakneſs, and ſpare no pains to expoſe it: and where can this mercileſs inquiſition end, but in the proud man's mortification to ſee his beſt faculties ſlighted, or traduced, and all his imperfections laid bare and expoſed? So good reaſon had the Apoſtle to warn the Galatian teachers againſt *vain-glory*, in the cloſe of the preceding chapter—*Let us*, ſays he, *not be vain-glorious, provoking one another, envying one another*; an exhortation, which the *vain-glorious* among them ſhould have liſtened to, even for their own ſakes.

WE SEE, then, that, *in theſe ſeveral reſpects*, a man, who *takes himſelf to be ſomething*, in effect proves himſelf *to be nothing*. So full of inſtruction is the plain unpretending aphoriſm in the text to the perſons concerned!

The Apoſtle adds—that ſuch a man DECEIVETH HIMSELF—which muſt needs

be, and cannot want to be enlarged upon; ſince it appears in the very inſtances, in which his *nothingneſs* has been ſhewn. The *vain-glorious* Chriſtian is manifeſtly and notoriouſly deceived in *thinking himſelf ſomething*—while that very conceit ſhews the contrary—while it ſhews that he overlooks the very principles of his religion—while it proves him to be void of Chriſtian charity, the very end of the commandment—while it betrays him into ignorance and folly, and therefore tends to ſubvert the very foundation, on which his *vain-glory* is raiſed—while, laſtly, in the event, it deprives him of that very conſideration to which he aſpires.

Such are the miſchiefs of *Self-conceit!* a Vice, which Reaſon univerſally condemns, but which our Chriſtian profeſſion renders moſt contemptible and ridiculous. Even, in the purſuits of *human* Science, where Reaſon can do moſt, all the efforts of the ableſt underſtanding penetrate but a little way. We know enough of the

Nature

Nature of things, to ſerve the purpoſes of common life; and enough of *the nature of Man*, to diſcover our duty towards each other. And within this narrow circle all our knowledge, be we as proud of it as we pleaſe, is confined. Clouds and darkneſs cover the reſt; and this the ableſt men of all times have ſeen and confeſſed. If there be a man, whom Heaven has formed with greater powers and ſtronger faculties than are commonly met with in the ſpecies, he is the *firſt* to diſcover, and to lament, his own blindneſs and weakneſs: a Socrates and a Paſcal have been conſidered as prodigies of parts and ingenuity; yet, while the meaneſt Sophiſter is puffed up with the conceit of his own knowledge, theſe divine men confeſs nothing ſo readily as their own ignorance.

And, if this be the caſe of human learning, what muſt we think of *Divine?* where Reaſon teaches nothing, beyond the exiſtence and attributes of God, and, as to every thing elſe, without the aid of *Revelation*,

lation, is ſtark-blind. *The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God*—is an aſſertion, to which common ſenſe and common experience muſt aſſent. Yet ſhall every idle Speculatiſt, who has but the confidence to call himſelf a Philoſopher, treat the *Divine word*, as freely as any ordinary ſubject; and pronounce as peremptorily of the *revealed will of God*, which the Angels themſelves adore in ſilence, as if he knew for certain that his poor and ſcanty underſtanding was commenſurate with *the councils of the moſt High*.

To theſe profeſſors of Science, whether human or divine, who know ſo little of themſelves as to preſume they know every thing, may the Apoſtle's aphoriſm be moſt fitly addreſſed—*If a man think himſelf to be ſomething, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himſelf*—; and, through all the ſimplicity of the expreſſion, the good ſenſe of the obſervation muſt be felt by the proudeſt underſtanding.

Not, that the proper remedy for this evil, of *Self-conceit*, is a vile ſubjection of the underſtanding, which our holy Religion diſdains, and to which none but ſlaves will ſubmit—nor yet Scepticiſm, another vice, to which the leſs ſanguine diſputers of this world are much addicted—but a modeſt uſe of the faculties we poſſeſs, and above all, *Charity*. It is but another ſpecies of *Pride*, to pretend that we know nothing; *Chriſtian Humility* is beſt expreſſed in referring, what we know, to the good of others. Without this reference, all our claims of ſuperior wiſdom are vain and deluſive: for it is with *knowledge*, as with faith, unleſs it *work by charity*, it is nothing.

To return to the text, then, and to conclude.

Let the ignominy of this *Self-deluſion* deter us, if nothing elſe can, from the unſeemly arrogance, it ſo well expoſes and condemns. And let us learn to revere the wiſdom of the great Apoſtle, who, by

couching ſo momentous an admonition in ſo plain terms, has taught us, That, as conceit and vain-glory terminate in ſhame and diſappointment; ſo the modeſty of unpretending knowledge may be entitled to our higheſt eſteem.

SER-

SERMON XIII.

Preached May 16, 1773.

2 Cor. x. 12.

We dare not make ourſelves of the number, or compare ourſelves, with ſome that commend themſelves: But they, meaſuring themſelves by themſelves, and comparing themſelves among themſelves, are not wiſe.

I SHALL not inquire, *who* the perſons were, to whom theſe words are applied. It is enough, for the uſe I intend to make of them, to obſerve, that they contain a cenſure of *ſome* perſons, "who, "conſcious of certain advantages, and too "much taken up in the contemplation of "them, came to think better of them-

" ſelves, and, conſequently, worſe of " others, than they had reaſon to do; de- " monſtrating, by this their partiality (as " the Apoſtle gently remonſtrates), that " *they were not wiſe.*"

But this cenſure admits a more extenſive application. *Meaſuring themſelves by themſelves, and comparing themſelves among themſelves*, whole nations, and even ages, as well as individuals, are, ſometimes, miſled in the eſtimate they make of their own worth; and never more eaſily, or remarkably, than when the object of their partial fondneſs is their proficiency in *knowledge*, and, above all, in *religious* knowledge: for nothing flatters the pride of human nature ſo much, as an idea of ſuperiority in the exerciſe of its *beſt faculties*, on the *nobleſt ſubjects*.

It would be eaſy to illuſtrate this obſervation by *many* examples, that have occurred in the hiſtory of mankind. But ONE, only, will ſufficiently employ your thoughts at this time; and that one (to

make it the more intereſting and uſeful) ſhall be taken from OURSELVES.

The improvements, that have been made, for two or three centuries paſt, in almoſt every art and ſcience, ſeem to authorize the *preſent age* to think with ſome reſpect, of itſelf. It accordingly exults in the idea of its own wiſdom: and *this country*, in particular, which has contributed its full ſhare to thoſe improvements, may well be thought as forward, as any other, to pay itſelf this tribute of ſelf-eſteem. It would not be ſtrange, if it appeared, on inquiry, That ſome *preſumption* had, in either caſe, been indulged; and had even operated, according to the *nature* of preſumption, to the prejudice of that claim, which, with ſo much confidence, has been ſet up. But I have now in view, only, *one effect* of this preſumption; I mean, the complacency which many take in ſuppoſing, That the *preſent age* excels equally in *ſacred*, and *ſecular* learning; and, with regard to ourſelves, That *our* theological

gical knowledge as much ſurpaſſes that of our fore-fathers at the Reformation, as *their* knowledge did, the thick and groſs ignorance of the monkiſh ages.

It concerns us, for more reaſons than one, not to miſtake in this matter. The direct way to decide upon it, would, no doubt, be, To compare the beſt modern writers, with the ableſt of thoſe among the Reformers, on the ſubject of religion. But, till ye have the leiſure or curioſity to make this compariſon for yourſelves, ye will pay ſome regard, it may be, to the following conſiderations; which, at leaſt, I think, make it queſtionable, whether *our* claims, in particular (for the inquiry ſhall, for the preſent, be confined to them), whether, I ſay, *our* pretenſions to religious knowledge have not been carried too far. And,

I. One is tempted to aſk, whether it be credible, that we of this age ſhould have much advantage over our Reformers, in reſpect of religious knowledge, when both had

had an opportunity of deriving it from the ſame ſource? You will apprehend the meaning of this queſtion, if you reflect, that our Reformers had not their religious ſyſtem to fetch out of the dark rolls of ancient tradition, and much leſs to create, or faſhion for themſelves, out of their own proper ſtock of ingenuity and invention. Had ſuch been their unhappy circumſtances, there would be reaſon enough to preſume that their ſyſtem was defective. For the firſt attempts towards perfection in any art, or ſcience, will not bear a compariſon with thoſe happier and more ſucceſsful efforts, which a length of time and continued application enable men to make. But the caſe of thoſe good men, we know, was wholly different. They had only to copy, or, rather, to inſpect, a conſummate model, made to their hands; I mean, the *ſacred ſcriptures*, which lay open to them, as they do to us; and, being taken by them, as we underſtand they were, for their *ſole* rule of faith, what ſhould hinder them, when

when they *read* thoſe ſcriptures, from ſeeing as diſtinctly, as we do at this day, what the Goſpel-terms of Salvation are, and what *the erudition of a Chriſtian man* ſhould be?

Did the primitive Chriſtians, a plain people, and taken, for the moſt part, from the loweſt ranks of life, did *they* underſtand their religion, when it was propoſed to them, ſo as to have no doubt concerning its great and leading principles; nay, ſo as to be the ſtandard of orthodoxy to all ſucceeding ages of the Church; and ſhall we think that the ableſt doctors at the Reformation, when they had once turned themſelves to the ſtudy of the ſacred volumes, could be at a loſs about the contents of them?

"Yes, it will, perhaps, be ſaid; the primitive Chriſtians had the advantage of reading the Scriptures in the languages in which they were compoſed, or of hearing them explained, at leaſt, by learned and well-inſtructed teachers: whereas, at the

the Reformation, thoſe languages were underſtood by few, or none; and conſequently, in thoſe days, there could be no perſons ſufficiently ſkilled in the ſacred ſcriptures to aſcertain their true meaning."

But to this charge of ignorance you will eaſily reply, by aſking,

2. In the next place, whether it can conſiſt with a *known fact*, namely, That the revival of letters had preceded the Reformation everywhere, eſpecially in England; and that the excellent perſons, who took the lead in that work, were, all of them, competently, and, ſome of them, deeply, ſkilled in the learned languages?

Indeed, in the nature of the thing, it is ſcarce poſſible, that the Reformers ſhould be ſo little verſed, as the objection ſuppoſes, in the original ſcriptures. For, whether the *new learning*, as it was called, had, or had not, been cultivated, *before* the Reformation began, we may be ſure it would *then* be cultivated with the utmoſt aſſiduity;

duity; both, becauſe it was a *new* learning, that is, becauſe the charms of novelty would naturally engage many in the ſtudy of it; and, becauſe no ſtep could be taken in the Reformation, without ſome proficiency in *that* learning. Now, if you conſider, of what the human mind is capable, when puſhed on by two ſuch active principles, as *learned curioſity*, and *religious zeal*, you will conclude with yourſelves, even without recurring to poſitive teſtimony, that the Reformers muſt needs have made an acquaintance with the authentic text: *ſuch* an acquaintance, as would let them into a clear apprehenſion, at leaſt, of thoſe doctrines, which are the *elementary*, as we may ſay, or neceſſary ingredients in the conſtitution of a truly Chriſtian Church.

If you heſitate about coming to this concluſion, the reaſon, I ſuppoſe, is, that you conſider the Reformers as juſt then emerging from the darkneſs of Popery, and therefore ſo far blinded by the pre-

judices of *that* church [a], or by their *own* prejudices againſt it, as not to ſee diſtinctly, and at once, the true ſenſe of ſcripture, though they might be competently ſkilled in the learned languages. And, poſſibly, there is ſome truth, as well as plauſibility, in this ſuggeſtion, as applied to the caſe of the foreign Proteſtant Churches, which were formed with too much haſte, and in a time of too much heat, to be quite free from all ſuch exceptions. But, then, you will call to mind,

3. *Thirdly*, that the Reformation was not carried on with us in a precipitate tumultuary manner, as it was, for the moſt part, on the continent. On the other hand, it advanced, under the eye of the magiſtrate, by ſlow degrees; nay, it was, more than once, checked and kept back by him. Hence it came to paſs, that there was time allowed for taking the full benefit of all

[a] As in the caſe of the *real preſence* in the ſacrament of the altar.

[b] As in the caſe of *good works*.

diſcove-

diſcoveries, made abroad; for ſtudying the chief points of controverſy, with care; and for getting rid of ſuch miſtakes, as might ariſe from a haſty or paſſionate interpretation of holy Scripture. In ſhort, you will reflect, that, between the firſt contentions in Germany, on the account of Religion, and the final eſtabliſhment of it in the Church of England, under Elizabeth, there was the ſpace of near half a century: a ſpace, ſufficient, you will think (eſpecially, if the activity of thoſe times be conſidered) to admit all the *improvements of learning*, that were neceſſary to thoſe who had the charge of conducting the Reformation; and all the *deliberate circumſpection*, with which it was fit that ſo great a work ſhould be finally completed.

If it be ſaid, "that the Reformers are convicted of ignorance in *one* important part of ſcriptural knowledge, that of *Toleration*, and that therefore, poſſibly, they have erred in others;" I reply, that this ſubject had never been underſtood, from the

the firſt eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity down to the æra of the Reformation; and that the miſtakes about it had, chiefly, ariſen, not from a want of ſeeing what the ſcriptures had revealed, but of knowing how to reconcile the New Teſtament to the Old. If we are, now, able to do this, it is well. In the mean time, let it be acknowledged, that no peculiar charge of ignorance can be brought againſt the Reformers for miſapprehending a ſubject, not only difficult in itſelf, but perplexed with endleſs prejudices, and not yet, as appears, quite diſentangled of them. After all, this doctrine of intolerance, though it unhappily affected the *perſonal conduct* of our Reformers, has no place in the LITURGY and ARTICLES of our Church.

Still, perhaps, the main point, on which this queſtion, concerning the comparative ſkill of the two periods, in matters of religion, turns, is yet untouched; which is, that the amazing progreſs, confeſſedly made, ſince the æra of Reformation, in all

true *Philoſophy*, muſt have contributed very largely to the increaſe of *religious* knowledge; and that ſo much light of ſcience, as we now enjoy, muſt have ſerved to give us a clearer inſight, than our benighted anceſtors had, into the *revealed doctrines* of Chriſtianity.

But to this ſo flattering, and, at firſt view, not improbable, aſſumption, it may be replied,

4. In the laſt place, That the doctrines in queſtion, being *purely Chriſtian*, that is, ſuch as it pleaſed God to reveal to mankind concerning his eternal purpoſe in Chriſt Jeſus, that the doctrines, I ſay, having this original, and being of this nature, have, poſſibly, no communication with the diſcoveries of later times: that, of the divine councils, on ſuch a ſubject, we could have known nothing, if the Revelation had been ſilent; and that all we *do* know, when it ſpeaks cleareſt, is only *what* thoſe councils are, not on what *grounds* of reaſon they ſtand; whether it be,

be, that ſuch knowledge is unattainable by our faculties, or that it was ſeen to be improper for our ſituation: that, to ſay the leaſt, all the efforts of the ableſt men to explain the peculiar fundamental doctrines of our religion, on the principles of our philoſophy, have not hitherto been ſo ſucceſsful, as to make it certain that theſe doctrines are indeed cogniſable by human reaſon: that poſſibly, therefore, thoſe doctrines are the objects of *faith*, ſimply, and not of knowledge; in other words, that they are no clearer to us at this day, than they were to thoſe plainer men, who lived in the ſixteenth century [c].

And

[c] An ingenious writer, who appears not to have been hackneyed in the ways of controverſy, and is, therefore, the more likely to ſee the truth, in any plain queſtion of religion, as well as to declare it, expreſſes himſelf, fully, to the ſame effect—"It is very weakly urged that religion ſhould keep pace with ſcience in improvement; and that a ſubſcription to articles muſt always impede its progreſs: for nothing can be more abſurd than the idea of a progreſſive religion; which, being founded upon the declared, not the imagined will of God, muſt, if it attempt to proceed, relinquiſh that Revelation which is its baſis, and

And now, if we recollect the ſubſtance of what has been ſaid—That our Reformers had only to conſult the *Scriptures* for a juſt idea of the Chriſtian Religion—that they were likely enough to *underſtand* thoſe Scriptures, being invited, or rather impelled, to the ſtudy of them, by the moſt active principles of human nature—that they *could not but* underſtand thoſe Scriptures in all the more important points of doctrine, which they had ſo much time and occaſion to conſider, and which there wanted no more than a common ſkill in the language of ſcripture to underſtand—And that, laſtly, they could not have un-

ſo ceaſe to be a religion founded upon God's word. God has revealed himſelf; and all that he has ſpoken, and conſequently all that is demanded of us to accede to, is declared in one book, from which nothing is to be retrenched, and to which nothing can be added. All that it contains, was as perſpicuous to thoſe who firſt peruſed it, after the rejection of the papal yoke, as it can be to us NOW, or as it can be to our poſterity in the FIFTIETH GENERATION." See *A Scriptural Confutation of Mr. Lindſey's Apology.* Lond. 1774. p. 220.

derſtood

derſtood thoſe points *better*, than they did, even with all our real or fancied ſkill in philoſophy, becauſe, in truth, philoſophy is not applicable to thoſe points, being matters of pure Revelation, and not ſuſceptible of any additional clearneſs from the exertion of our beſt faculties, however improved—If theſe things, I ſay, are put together, we ſhall conceive it poſſible for our Reformers to have acquired ſuch a knowledge, at leaſt, of their religion, as not to deſerve that utter contempt, with which, on a compariſon with ourſelves, they are, ſometimes, treated.

But a ſingle FACT will, perhaps, ſpeak more conviction to you, than all theſe general preſumptive reaſonings. When the queſtion is, therefore, concerning the degree of religious knowledge, which ſuch men as Cranmer and Ridley poſſeſſed, let it be remembered, "That Eraſmus (who lived and died before the Engliſh Reformation had made any conſiderable progreſs, and the benefit of all whoſe light and

knowledge thoſe Reformers, therefore, had) that this learned man, I ſay, had, in thoſe days, explained himſelf as reaſonably, on almoſt every great topic of revealed religion, as any writer has ſince done, or is now able to do."

This *fact*, however, does not imply, that the age of the Reformation was equally enlightened with the preſent; or that the clearer light, we enjoy, is of no ſervice to religion. Our improved CRITICISM has been of uſe in aſcertaining the authority, and, ſometimes, in clearing the ſmaller difficulties, of the ſacred text; and our improved PHILOSOPHY has enabled many great men to ſet the evidences of revealed religion, in a juſter and ſtronger light: but, with the *doctrines* themſelves, our improvements, of whatever kind, have no concern. Be our proficiency in human ſcience what it may, thoſe doctrines are the *ſame* ſtill. Reaſon, under any degree of cultivation, may, if we pleaſe to miſapply it, perplex and corrupt our faith; but

but will never be able to ſee to the bottom of thoſe *judgements*, which are *unſearchable*, nor to clear up thoſe *ways*, which are *paſt finding out*[d].

To conclude: I am not, now, making the panegyric of thoſe venerable men, to whom we are indebted for our religious eſtabliſhment. They were our inferiors, if you will, in many reſpects. But, if, *meaſuring ourſelves by ourſelves, and comparing ourſelves among ourſelves*, we overlook their real abilities and qualifications; if we pronounce them ignorant of *good letters*, becauſe they lived in an age, which we have learned to call barbarous; and ignorant of the *Chriſtian religion*, becauſe they were not practiſed in our philoſophy; we, probably, do THEM great injuſtice, and take, it may be, not the beſt method of doing honour to OURSELVES.

[d] Rom. xi. 33.

A

LARGER DISCOURSE,

BY WAY OF

COMMENTARY,

ON

That remarkable Part of the Goſpel-Hiſtory,

IN WHICH

JESUS is repreſented, as driving the BUYERS and SELLERS out of the Temple.

A DISCOURSE*

ON

Chriſt's *driving the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple.*

I PROPOSE, in this diſcourſe, to take into conſideration a very remarkable part of the Goſpel-hiſtory; in which Jeſus is ſuppoſed to have exerciſed an act of authority on ſome perſons, whom the Jews permitted to carry on a certain traffic within the walls of the Temple.

I ſhall, FIRST, recite the ſeveral accounts, which the ſacred hiſtorians have given of this tranſaction; and ſhall, THEN, hazard ſome obſervations, which will, perhaps, be found to leſſen, or to remove the objections commonly made to it.

I begin with St. John's account of it, which is delivered in theſe words:

* The ſubſtance of this Diſcourſe was delivered in a Sermon at Lincoln's-Inn, May 15, 1768.

Ch. ii. 13—17. "And the Jews paſſover was
"at hand, and Jeſus went up to
"Jeruſalem, and found in the
"temple thoſe that ſold oxen,
"and ſheep, and doves, and the
"changers of money, ſitting:
"And when he had made a
"ſcourge of ſmall cords, he
"drove them all out of the
"temple, and the ſheep and
"the oxen; and poured out
"the changers money, and
"overthrew the tables; And
"ſaid unto them that ſold
"doves, Take theſe things
"hence; make not my Fa-
"ther's houſe an houſe of
"merchandize. And his diſci-
"ples remembered that it was
"written, The zeal of thine
"houſe hath eaten me up."

Thus far the Evangeliſt, St. John: And the order of the hiſtory ſhews, that this was done at the *firſt* Paſſover which Jeſus attended, after he had taken upon himſelf his prophetic office. The

The other Evangeliſts relate a ſimilar tranſaction, which happened at the Paſſover, immediately preceding his crucifixion. Some have imagined that, on this laſt occaſion, the ſame act was repeated by him, on two ſeveral days: but I ſee no ſufficient ground for that ſuppoſition. St. Mark is eaſily reconciled with St. Matthew and St. Luke by only admitting, what is very uſual in the ſacred writers, ſome little neglect of method in the narration of one or other of thoſe hiſtorians.

Matt. xxi. 12, 13. "And Jeſus went into the "temple of God, and caſt out "all them that ſold and bought "in the temple, and overthrew "the tables of the money-"changers, and the ſeats of "them that ſold doves, and "ſaid unto them, it is written, "My houſe ſhall be called the "houſe of prayer, but ye have "made it a den of thieves."

Mark xi. 15—17. "And they come to Jeruſa-"lem: And Jeſus went into the "temple,

" temple, and began to caſt out
" them that ſold and bought
" in the temple, and overthrew
" the tables of the money-
" changers, and the ſeats of
" them that ſold doves; And
" would not ſuffer that any
" man ſhould carry any veſſel
" through the temple. And
" he taught, ſaying unto them,
" Is it not written, My houſe
" ſhall be called of all nations
" the houſe of prayer? But
" ye have made it a den of
" thieves."

Luke xix. 45, 46. " And he went into the
" temple, and began to caſt
" out them that ſold therein,
" and them that bought, ſay-
" ing unto them, It is written,
" My houſe is the houſe of
" prayer: but ye have made it
" a den of thieves."

In reading theſe paſſages, one is led to conclude, that the ACT itſelf, here aſcribed to our Lord, was of no ſmall importance; for

for it is related, we ſee, by every one of the four Evangeliſts. The ſubſtance of what we learn from all of them, compared together, is this: "That Jeſus, at two ſeveral times, *once*, before the firſt Paſſover which he attended after the entrance on his miniſtry, and *again*, before the Paſſover which preceded his paſſion, went up to Jeruſalem, and entered into the *Temple*; that is (as all interpreters agree, and as the nature of the thing ſpeaks) into the *firſt*, or outermoſt court of the Temple, or that which was called *the Court of the Gentiles*; becauſe the Gentiles, who acknowledged the one true God, were permitted to come and worſhip him there: that in this court (which was ſeparated from the next or ſecond court by a ſept or low wall, and deemed by the Jews *prophane*, in contempt of the Gentiles, to whoſe uſe it was dedicated) *he found thoſe that ſold oxen and ſheep and doves, and the changers of money*; that is, perſons who attended there to furniſh what was neceſſary for the ſervice of the temple,

temple, and ſo made a kind of market, of this firſt court or diviſion of it: that, upon obſerving this prophanation, *he made a ſcourge of ſmall cords*, or, as the word in the original ſtrictly means, of *ruſhes*, ſuch as he may be ſuppoſed to have found upon the ſpot, and with this ſcourge drove theſe traffickers from their ſtation; ſignifying, by this and ſuch like actions, his diſpleaſure at this pollution of a part of the temple; and ſaying to them, withall, *It is written, My houſe ſhall be called the houſe of prayer of all nations: But ye have made it an houſe of merchandize*, or, as the equivalent expreſſion is, *a den of thieves.*

Thus ſtands the hiſtory itſelf: And the light, in which it is commonly underſtood, is this; "That Jeſus, in virtue of his prophetic, or if you will, *regal* character, did this act of authority, to teſtify his zeal for the honour of God's houſe, thus polluted and deſecrated, contrary to its original purpoſe and deſign, by the baſe and commercial uſes, that were now made

of it:" and it is probable, that the Diſciples themſelves, *at the time*, conſidered it in this light, only, *for they remembered*, St. John ſays, *that it was written, The zeal of thine houſe hath eaten me up*—applying a paſſage out of the Pſalms, to this act of zeal in their maſter.

It is true, this circumſtance is only related by St. John, who records the *former* tranſaction, and omits the *latter*: the reaſon of this difference will, perhaps, be ſeen, as we proceed in our inquiry.

But to this ſolution of the caſe ſome objections have been made.

Beſides the ſtrangeneſs and indecency, as many apprehend, of the proceeding itſelf, and the improbability that the perſons concerned in this chaſtiſement, who had public allowance for what they did, ſhould patiently ſubmit to it (for we hear of no reſiſtance, nor of any complaint, made by them).—Beſides, I ſay, theſe obvious conſiderations, the act itſelf was an act of CIVIL POWER, which Jeſus always

diſclaimed, and for which, it will be ſaid, he had no warrant, either from the ruling Jews themſelves, or from his regal, or prophetic character: not, from *the ruling Jews*, who, we know, were offended at his behaviour; not, from his *regal* character, which was not of this world; nor yet, laſtly, from his *prophetic* office: for, though that might authorize him to declare his ſenſe of this prophanation, it may be thought not to extend ſo far as to juſtify him in diſturbing the civil rights of men, and doing a direct violence to their property and perſons. Jeſus himſelf, we underſtand, was ſo tender of *both*, that, upon another occaſion, when it was propoſed to him to divide a conteſted inheritance between two claimants, he ſaid to the propoſer, *Man, who made me a judge, or a divider over you*[a]? Whence it may ſeem reaſonable to infer, that he would not have interpoſed, by an overt act of authority or juriſdiction, in *this* caſe; not-

[a] Luke xii. 14.

withſtanding

withſtanding the reference it had to the honour of religion, or the right he might have to condemn an abuſive practice, from his ſpiritual character.

Theſe difficulties ſeem to ſhew, that there is ſomething more in the caſe, than a mere expreſſion of zeal againſt the prophaners of the temple: not but this might be one end, but it could not be the ſole or even principal end, of ſo extraordinary a tranſaction.

I do not indeed find, that the antient commentators on the Goſpels have ſaid any thing to the difficulties, I have mentioned. They ſeem to have looked no farther than to the obvious ſenſe of this tranſaction, and to have acquieſced in the opinion of its being intended to evidence our Lord's zeal for the honour of God's houſe, without any further view or purpoſe whatſoever. They found it related as a matter of fact; and they piouſly admitted the authority of Jeſus to controul the civil uſages and rights of the Jews, by

virtue of his tranſcendant power and divine character.

But the moderns have been aware of the objections, which lie againſt this interpretation. Our learned Selden, in particular, has an entire chapter, in his book *De jure naturali et gentium juxta diſciplinam Hebræorum*, on this ſubject [b]. His notion is, That Jeſus exerted this act of power, in virtue of what the Jews called, THE RIGHT OR PRIVILEGE OF ZEALOTS [c]; by which they meant, not a general zeal or indignation (ſuch as is before ſpoken of) againſt what they conceived to be derogatory to the honour of their religion; but a *right*, ſtrictly ſo called, derived to

[b] L. iv. c. 5.

[c] And to the ſame purpoſe, our excellent Archbiſhop Tillotſon—"His [Chriſt's] whipping of the buyers "and ſellers out of the temple, the only action of his "life in which there appears any tranſport of anger, "was no other than a BECOMING ZEAL for the honour "of God's houſe, which he ſaw ſo notoriouſly pro-"phaned; which zeal was WARRANTED, after the "example of Phinehas, by the extraordinary occaſion "of it." Works, vol. iii. § 136. p. 222.

them

them from the civil inſtitutions and approved uſages of their country, of interfering, in ſome extraordinary caſes, to repel a manifeſt inſult on their Law, by private force, without waiting for the ſlow proceſs of a judicial determination.

The principal, or rather ſole foundation, on which this notion is erected, is the caſe of *Phinehas*, related in the book of NUMBERS[d]: which the Jews afterwards conſtrued into a *Law*, or embraced at leaſt as a *traditionary* rule of conduct, derived to them, as they ſuppoſed, from the times of Moſes. But this caſe will by no means bear the conſtruction, which has been made of it. For,

1. It was a ſingle and very *particular* caſe, without any intimation from the hiſtorian, that it was afterwards to be drawn into Precedent.

2. It may ſeem to have been, if not commanded, yet in ſome meaſure authorized, or it was, at leaſt, by an expreſs

[d] *Numbers*, ch. xxv.

Revelation, afterwards juſtified. For the matter is thus related. Upon the defection of the Iſraelites at Shittim into idolatry, in conſequence of their prophane, as well as impure commerce with *the daughters of Moab*, God ſent a plague among them, and beſides commanded Moſes to put to death all thoſe who had been guilty of ſuch abominations. Moſes obeyed, and *ſaid unto the Judges of Iſrael, ſlay ye every one his men, that were joined unto Baal-Peor.*

This command was iſſued very properly to the *Judges:* but a *private* man, *Phinehas, the Son of Eleazer, the Son of Aaron the Prieſt*, inſtigated by his zeal, and preſuming perhaps on his relationſhip to the high prieſt (from whoſe family, a more than ordinary zeal in ſuch a caſe might be expected) did, under theſe circumſtances, take upon himſelf to execute that command on two perſons, ſurprized in the very act, for which the penalty had been denounced, in the preſence of all the people. Now, though this proceeding was irregular in itſelf,

itſelf, yet the notoriety of the fact, the moſt atrocious that could be, and the moſt daring inſult on the divine authority, ſeemed almoſt to ſuperſede the neceſſity of a legal proceſs. The conſequence was, that God himſelf was pleaſed to accept and reward the deed, becauſe the author of it, on ſuch a provocation, and at ſuch a time, *was zealous for his God, and had made an atonement for the children of Iſrael.*

But to argue from a ſingle inſtance, ſo circumſtanced, that the ſame zeal was allowable in other caſes, in which no ſuch countenance had been given, and no ſuch neceſſity or provocation could be pretended, is evidently ſo unreaſonable, that no ſtreſs ought to be laid on this argument. The Jews, indeed, in ſucceeding times, might fancy a general rule to have been implied in this ſingle inſtance; and we know from their hiſtory, to what enormous exceſſes this their eaſy belief, concurring with a natural violence of temper, after-

wards tranſported them, during the laſt calamities of this devoted people[e]: but our Lord was very unlikely to give a countenance to their traditions, or to add the ſanction of his authority to a principle, ſo weakly founded, and ſo liable to the worſt abuſe.

3. This *traffic of the merchants*, in the court of the Gentiles, how unfit ſoever it might be, depended on the ſame authority, as this pretended *right itſelf of the Zealots*; that is, on the allowed uſage and conſtant diſcipline of their country. No expreſs precept of the Law could be alledged for either. So that this *right* could not be exerted but at the expence of *another*, equally well founded.

4. Mr. Selden himſelf appears to have had ſome diſtruſt of his own hypotheſis, by the care he takes to interweave, in his diſcourſe, a charge of *fraud* on the merchants, together with their *prophanation* of the temple. But the learned writer forgets,

[e] Josephus, *De Bello Judaico*, l. iv. c. 12.

forgets, that ZELOTISM (if I may have leave to uſe a new term) reſpected *Religion* only, and not private morals. For even *the act of zeal*, performed by Phinehas (from which, only, the very idea of this *Jewiſh right*, if it were one, was derived) had, for its object, not the *fornication* ſimply, but the *idolatry*, of the criminals: it was a ſacrifice, not to the honour of *Virtue*, as ſuch, but to the *honour of God*. And, indeed, nothing but the ſingular ſtructure of the Jewiſh polity, in which the honour of God was ſo extraordinarily conſidered, could give any the leaſt colour to the *fiction* of ſuch a right.

5. *Laſtly*, whatever degree of credit this principle of *Zelotiſm* might have acquired among the Jews, it was very unlikely, perhaps we may ſay, impoſſible, that Jeſus ſhould act upon it. When the Diſciples, *James* and *John*, on a certain occaſion, were inſtigated by this *zeal* to call for fire from heaven on the heads of ſome perſons, who had offered an inſult to their

maſter, Jeſus himſelf rebuked them in theſe terms—*Ye know not what ſpirit ye are of: For the Son of man is not come to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them* [Luke ix. 55.]—To *burn with fire*, is indeed ſomething more than, *to ſcourge:* but, though the vengeance be not equal, in theſe two inſtances, the *ſpirit* is the ſame from which it is derived, and by which it is juſtified: and this *ſpirit*, we are expreſsly told, is not that by which Jeſus choſe to conduct himſelf. It was to no purpoſe to alledge the caſe of a Phinehas, or even an Elias: theſe were no precedents for HIM, who *came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them.*

I conclude then, upon the whole, that Jeſus did not perform this act of driving the merchants out of the temple, in the Jewiſh character of ZEALOT; in what *other* character he might poſſibly perform it, I ſhall now inquire.

The ingenious conjecture of Mr. Selden, already conſidered, was apparently taken up by

by him to avoid the difficulties which he found in accounting for this act of zeal in our Lord, from his *Prophetic* character only. Theſe difficulties, he ſaw very diſtinctly and has explained with much force. "Though the Saviour of the world, ſays he, was undoubtedly both God and King, and, by his abſolute dominion, not over the Jews only, but the whole race of mankind, muſt be ſuppoſed to have had a right of doing whatever he ſaw fit to do; yet ſince we know, that he conſtantly ſubmitted himſelf in all things to the eſtabliſhed forms of civil juſtice, whether of Jewiſh, or Roman inſtitution; and, as being deſirous to exhibit in his own perſon a moſt abſolute example of obedience to the courſe of human authority, was careful always to abſtain from every thing, that might be thought a violation of it in any private man; ſince, beſides, we know, that, conſidering the peculiar envy, to which his life was expoſed, he could not poſſibly have gratified his enemies more, than by putting

putting it in their power to bring a criminal charge againſt him; it muſt, on all theſe accounts, be thought reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that our Lord would not have ventured on ſo extraordinary an act, as that of driving the merchants out of the temple, unleſs it had been ſuch, as, even in the opinion of thoſe who were moſt prejudiced againſt him, he might lawfully and regularly perform [f]."

[f] Certè, quamquam Servator humani generis et Deus et Rex erat, adeoque ita univerſi, nedum Judæorum, dominus, ut quicquid ei placeret illud non licitum fuiſſe nefas ſit putare; attamen, cum cæteras res omnes etiam et ſeipſum receptis atque ſtabilitis reipublicæ formulis judiciariis, qua Ebraicæ eæ eſſent, qua Romanæ, permiſerit, atque abſolutiſſimum juſtitiæ exemplar ab omni vi illicita, veluti privatus, abſtinere voluerit; quin et tanta ei imminuerit invidia, ut nihil magis incidentium in votis eſſet, quam ut cujuſcunque delicti reum eum peragere potuiſſent; haud rationi ſane ita conſonum videtur exiſtimare ejectionem illam factam ſeu vim illatam ab eo fuiſſe ſine agnita, etiam ab ipſis qui tam malignè ei invidebant, lege ſeu more, quo in id genus homines templi ſanctitatem ita polluentes incurrere licuerit, atque vi ejicere. L. iv. c. 5. p. 464.

All

All this, the reader ſees, is prudently, piouſly, and ably ſaid, by this very learned writer; and I readily ſubſcribe to every word of it. We only differ in our concluſion from theſe premiſes. Mr. Selden holds, that what Jeſus did on this occaſion, *cannot* be reconciled to the idea of his PROPHETIC CHARACTER, as ſuſtained by him in the courſe of his miniſtry: I, on the contrary, conceive, that it very well *may*. But then I conſider that *character*, as exerciſed by our Lord, at this time, in *another manner*, and to *other ends*, than the learned writer ſuppoſed.

In a word, I ſee Jeſus in the light, not of a ZEALOT, but of a PROPHET only, in this whole tranſaction. I ſee him acting, not on precarious principles and rabbinical traditions, but on the ſure baſis of ſcripture; and regulating his conduct by the known ideas of his office, ſuch as had at all times been entertained of it, and were even now familiar to the Jews in the times in which he lived.

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To make way for what I have further to advance on this ſubject, It will, then, be neceſſary to conſider, *firſt*, the PRACTICES AND USAGES of the Jewiſh prophets, I mean the *manner*, in which that high office was ſometimes diſcharged and exerciſed by them, even to the very times in queſtion: and, *ſecondly*, to conſider the true ſcope and meaning of the PROPHECY itſelf, to which Jeſus appeals, and on which he juſtifies this obnoxious part of his conduct.

1. It is impoſſible for thoſe, who have read the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament, not to obſerve, how much they abound in figures and material images. Nay, the prophets are frequently repreſented as inſtructing thoſe, to whom they are ſent, not in figurative expreſſion only, but in the way of action and by ſenſible ſigns. And this mode of information has been ſhewn by learned men [g] to ariſe from the

[g] Mr. Smith's Diſcourſes, *Diſc.* vi. ch. vi. Biſhop Chandler, *Def. of Chriſtianity*, ch. iii. § 1. and,

very nature of language, in its rude and imperfect ſtate; being indeed an apt and neceſſary expedient to ſupply the defects of ſpeech, under that circumſtance. It has further been made appear, from the hiſtory of mankind, that this practice univerſally prevailed in all barbarous nations, as well as in Judæa; nay, that it every where *continued* to prevail, as an ornamental method of communication, long after the neceſſity was over, which had given birth to it; eſpecially among the inhabitants of the Eaſt, to whoſe natural vivacity it was ſo well ſuited. Hence, the Jewiſh prophets, it is ſaid, but conformed to the eſtabliſhed practice of their own times, when they adopted this uſe of repreſentative action: as, when one Prophet *puſhed with horns of iron*, to denote the overthrow of the Syrians[h]; and another, *broke a potter's veſſel to pieces*,

very lately, the Biſhop of Glouceſter, *Div. Leg.* b. iv. § 4.

[h] 1 Kings xxii. 11.

to,

to expreſs the ſhattered fortune of the Jews[i]; with innumerable other inſtances of the like nature.

This the prophet Hoſea calls, *uſing ſimilitudes by the* HAND *of the prophets*[k]; and the effect of it was, to impreſs the propoſed information on the minds of men with more force (being addreſſed to their eyes and ſenſes) than could have been done by a mere verbal explication.

This mode of teaching by ſigns, then, let it be remembered, was familiar to the Jewiſh nation, and prevailed even in the days of Jeſus; as is clear from John the Baptiſt's *wearing a garment of camel's hair, and eating Locuſts and wild honey*[l]; to ſignify the mortification and repentance, which he was commiſſioned to preach—from Chriſt's *riding into Jeruſalem*[m]; to ſignify the aſſumption of his regal office—and from his directing his diſciples

[i] Jeremiah xix.
[k] Hoſea xii. 10.
[l] Matthew iii. 4.
[m] Mark xi. 7.

to

to *ſhake off the duſt of their feet* [n], *as a teſtimony againſt them*, who would not receive his Goſpel.

And we find that, ſometimes, even a miracle was wrought to furniſh a convenient *ſign*—As when Simon's *draught of fiſhes* [o], was made to denote the ſucceſs he ſhould have in his miniſtry; according to the interpretation of Chriſt himſelf, who ſaid to him, *Henceforth thou ſhalt catch men*—As, again, when Jeſus *curſt the barren fig-tree* [p], to ſignify the unfruitfulneſs and rejection of the Jewiſh nation—And, as when he permitted *the unclean ſpirits to enter into a herd of ſwine*, which, thereupon, *ran violently down a ſteep place and periſhed in the waters* [q]: an exertion of his miraculous power, which, among other purpoſes, might be intended to expreſs, in the way of *repreſentation*, the tyranny of evil ſpirits, and their attendants, evil

[n] Matthew x. 14.
[o] Luke v. 6.
[p] Mark xi. 14.
[q] Matthew viii. 32.

habits, over ſenſual and voluptuous men (of whom *ſwine* are the acknowledged emblems), and the conſequent *perdition in which they drown them.* Nay, the very parables of our Lord, are but this mode of information, by material ſigns, once removed.

It may, further, be obſerved, that the two Chriſtian Sacraments themſelves are founded on this principle: and ſo prevalent was the uſe of conveying information in this form, that even the Roman Governor, when he condemned Jeſus, *took water and waſhed his hands*[r] *before the multitude*, to ſignify to them, that he was innocent of that horid crime.

From all this we may certainly conclude, that it was very cuſtomary in our Saviour's time for men to expreſs themſelves by outward and viſible ſigns: that this mode of expreſſion was eſpecially of antient and approved uſe among the Prophets, when they would inforce ſome high

[r] Matthew xxvii. 24.

and

and important topic of inſtruction: and that, not impoſſibly therefore, the famous tranſaction in the temple may be only an information of this nature.

If then we would know, what that *information* was, or, in other words, what was the peculiar *object* of it, it will be proper, in the next place,

2. To turn to the PROPHECY, to which Jeſus appeals; and to conſider the true ſcope and purpoſe of it.

The prophecies of Iſaiah, it is well known, are chiefly taken up in predicting the future glories of Chriſt's kingdom, of which *the call of the Gentiles* makes a conſpicuous and ſhining part. This great event is foretold in a vaſt variety of places; and in different forms of expreſſion, one while, plain and direct, at other times, figurative and obſcure. The Meſſiah is ſpoken of as *bringing forth judgement to the Gentiles*, and more clearly ſtill, as *being given for a light to the Gentiles*[s]. In other

[s] Iſaiah xlii. 1. 6.

places, the expreſſion is ænigmatical; as where the Heathen are mentioned as *priſoners*, who ſhall be ſet at liberty [t]—as *ſtrangers*, who ſhould build up the walls of Jeruſalem [u]—*as blind people, that have eyes, and deaf, that have ears* [w]—and under a multitude of other images.

Full of theſe ideas, the Prophet begins the fifty-ſixth chapter with the following triumphant exhortation—*Thus ſaith the Lord, Keep ye judgement and do juſtice, for my Salvation is near to come, and my righteouſneſs to be revealed*; the very language, almoſt, in which the Baptiſt afterwards announced our Saviour to the Jews: whence it may appear, of *what* Salvation the Prophet is here ſpeaking. But to *whom* is this Salvation promiſed? Why, in general, to thoſe *who keep the Sabbath from polluting it*, ver. 2; that is, in the prophetic ſtyle, to thoſe who ſhould embrace the Chriſtian faith: for the *Sabbath* being

[t] Iſaiah xlii. 7.
[u] Chap. lx. 10.
[w] Chap. xliii. 8.

the

the ſign or token of God's covenant with the Jews, hence the prophets transfer this idea to the Chriſtian Covenant; and, by *keeping the Sabbath*, they expreſs the obſervance of that future covenant, to which mankind ſhould be admitted under the miniſtry of Jeſus.

But, perhaps, the Jews *only* were to be admitted to this new covenant of Salvation. The prophet expreſsly aſſerts the contrary: for not only the Jews of the captivity (to whom we are to ſuppoſe the courſe of the Prophecy to be immediately directed) are concerned in this Salvation, but THE SONS OF THE STRANGER, that is, the Gentiles (whom the Jews always conſidered under the idea of *Strangers*, juſt as the Greeks did the reſt of the world, under that of *Barbarians*)—*Even them* (ſays the Prophet, ſpeaking in the perſon of God) *will I bring to my holy mountain*, ver. 7, and make them joyful *in my houſe of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their ſacrifices ſhall be accepted on my altar.* The

language is ſtill *Jewiſh*, according to the prophetic ſtyle, which deſcribes the Chriſtian diſpenſation under Jewiſh ideas: but by *holy mountain* is meant the Church of Chriſt; and by *Sacrifices*, the ſpiritual ſervices of that new œconomy. And, to make this purpoſe of his prophecy the clearer, he even departs, in one inſtance, from his *Legal* manner of expreſſion, in ſaying, *I will make them joyful in my* HOUSE OF PRAYER; which is a ſpiritual and Chriſtian idea; the Jewiſh temple being properly a *houſe of Sacrifice*, and not of *prayer*; for which laſt ſervice there is no expreſs precept in the Law. And then follows the prophecy, quoted by Jeſus, as explanatory of what he was then doing—*for mine houſe ſhall be called an houſe of prayer for all people*. The prophet, as ſollicitous to be underſtood, repeats and marks out this diſtinction: I ſpoke of it, ſays he, as my houſe of prayer, *For my houſe ſhall* [in thoſe latter days] *be called* [that is, ſhall *be*] a *houſe of prayer*, and that too, *for all people*;

people; that is, not for the Jews only, but for *all the Gentiles.* And, as if all this were not ſtill clear enough, he adds — *The Lord God, which gathereth the outcaſts of Iſrael,* the Jews diſperſed in the captivity, *ſaith, Yet I will gather* OTHERS *to him, beſides thoſe that are gathered to him,* ver. 8; that is, the Gentiles.

This famous text, then, is clearly a prediction of the call of the Gentiles into the church of Chriſt, a prediction of that great event which ſhould take place under the new diſpenſation, when the Jewiſh incloſure was to be laid open, and all men indifferently, the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, were to be admitted into the Chriſtian covenant.

It is true, our Engliſh verſion of this text, quoted by our Lord, very much obſcures, or rather perverts, its ſenſe. It ſtands thus in the Goſpel of St. Mark — *My houſe ſhall be called of all nations the houſe of prayer,* xi. 17. Whence it appears, that our tranſlators conſidered this

text, as deſcribing only the *deſtination* of the Jewiſh temple, and not as predicting the *genius* of the Chriſtian religion. But the ſcope of the prophecy, as above explained, and the Greek text itſelf, clearly ſhews, that it ought to have been rendered thus—*My houſe ſhall be called a houſe of prayer for all the Gentiles:* ὁ οἶκός μου, οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν.

Thus much being premiſed, both *of the prophetic manner of teaching by ſigns*, and *of the true meaning of this prophecy*, let us ſee now what light theſe conſiderations afford to our preſent ſubject.

Jeſus enters into that court of the Temple, which was called *the court of the Gentiles*; who had leave to worſhip the God of Iſrael there, but were permitted to advance no further. This *Court*, he finds polluted by the ſale of beaſts, and the traffic of merchants; the Jews, in their ſovereign contempt of theſe poor heathen, not only excluding them from their own place of worſhip, but debaſing them ſtill farther

farther by the allowance of this ſordid ſociety to mix with them. What is the conduct of our Lord, on this occaſion? Why, agreeably to his prophetic character, he declares himſelf ſent to break through all theſe excluſive privileges and diſtinctions; to accompliſh that great myſtery, which the old prophets had ſo much and ſo triumphantly ſpoken of, as reſerved to be revealed by him; and to admit the Heathen to an equal participation of the bleſſings, which the Goſpel-covenant was to diſpenſe, with the Jewiſh people.

But, in what manner does he declare this purpoſe? Why, he *makes a ſcourge of ſmall cords*, and, by the repreſentative action of driving this profane company out of the temple, ſhews that he is come to break down that partition-wall, which ſeparated the Gentile and the Jewiſh worſhipers, to vindicate the deſpiſed Heathen from the inſults offered to them, and to lay open the means of Salvation to all people. *He began to caſt out them that ſold*

therein and them that bought, ſaying to them, It is written, My houſe ſhall be called a houſe of prayer for all the Gentiles. The action, we ſee, is uſed as *expreſſive* of his deſign; and his *deſign* is clearly aſcertained, by applying to himſelf the expreſs words of Iſaiah. The whole is, then, *a prophetic information, by way of action*, of the genius of Chriſtianity, which was to extend its benefits even to the Gentiles.

I have before acknowledged, that a *ſecondary* purpoſe of this tranſaction might be, to give the Jews to underſtand, how culpable they had been in permitting even a lawful traffic to be carried on in any part of their Temple. For it was uſual with Jeſus to accompliſh ſeveral ends by the ſame act, and even to lay the greateſt apparent ſtreſs on that end, which was not firſt in his intention: of which ſome examples may hereafter be given. But the primary deſign of *this* act (and but for the ſake of which it would not have been undertaken) I ſuppoſe, was, to point out

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the diffuſive nature and influence of his ſpiritual kingdom.

It may be ſaid, perhaps, that, if ſuch was the intention of Jeſus, it had been more properly and ſignificantly expreſſed by a different act, I mean, by that *of bringing the Heathen into the temple*, rather than *of driving the merchants out of it.* But we are to reflect, that, as the Heathen were already permitted to come into this part of the temple (and it would have given, at this time, too great a ſhock to the prejudices of the Jews, to have carried them into any other), that act would have conveyed no new information; it being on all hands agreed that the devout Heathen might worſhip there. The buſineſs was, to ſhew that their religious privileges were, hereafter, to be the ſame with thoſe of the Jews; and that no more contempt was to be countenanced, towards the one, than the other. All diſtinctions were to ceaſe; and this information was, therefore, moſt fitly conveyed by

by an act, which expreſſed the ſame regard for the court of the Gentiles, as for the court of the Jews: that is, the honour of each is equally aſſerted, and no prophanation allowed of either.

In further confirmation of the ſenſe, here given to this tranſaction, it may be obſerved, that the relation of it is joined, or rather interwoven with that other of his *curſing the barren fig-tree*: which was plainly an emblem, and ſo is *confeſſed* to be, of *the rejection of the Jews*; juſt as that we have been conſidering is *preſumed* to be, of *the call of the Gentiles*: theſe two things being cloſely connected in the order of God's diſpenſations. Whence St. Paul ſpeaks of the one, as the conſequence of the other; of *the fall of the Jews*, as *the riches of the world*; and of *the loſs of the Jews*, as *the riches of the Gentiles* [x]. Now, if we turn to St. Mark, we there find [y], that the *fig-tree is curſed*, as Jeſus is coming from Bethany to Jeruſalem — that,

[x] Rom. xi. 12.

[y] Mark xi. 14.

when

when he came to Jeruſalem, he went into the temple, and *drove out the money-changers*, &c.—and that the next morning, when he and his diſciples were returning the ſame way, *as they paſſed by, they ſaw the fig-tree dried up from the roots* [z].

If then it be allowed, that Chriſt meant, by the *ſign* of the blaſted fig-tree (the ſtory of which is ſo remarkably incorporated with that other of purging the temple), to expreſs and predict *the rejection of the Jews*, how natural is it to ſuppoſe that, in purging the temple, he meant to expreſs and predict, by another ſign, *the vocation of the Gentiles!* Or, if there be ſtill any doubt in the caſe, Chriſt's own parable of the *Vineyard* (which follows cloſe in the hiſtory [a]) will effectually remove it. For the application of this parable is made by Chriſt himſelf to BOTH theſe ſubjects [b]—*What ſhall the Lord of the Vineyard do?—He ſhall come and deſtroy* THOSE

[z] Mark xi. 15—20.
[a] Mark xii. Luke xx. Matt. xxi.
[b] Luke xx. 16—19.

huſband-

huſbandmen, and ſhall give the Vineyard to OTHERS—That is, He ſhall REJECT THE JEWS, and ADMIT THE GENTILES: an interpretation, ſo clear and certain, that the Jews themſelves could not avoid ſeeing it; *for they perceived, that he had ſpoken this parable againſt them.*

But I think it appears, from the conduct of the ruling Jews, on occaſion of what had paſſed in the Temple, that it was well underſtood for *what general purpoſe*, and under *what character*, Jeſus had exhibited that extraordinary ſcene. For they preſently come to him, and ſay, *By what authority doeſt thou theſe things, and who gave thee this authority*[c]? That this queſtion relates to *what things* he had done in the Temple, when he applied the ſcourge to the merchants, the context clearly ſhews; and is indeed beyond all doubt, ſince we find the ſame queſtion put to him, and almoſt in the ſame words, when he had performed this act before,

[c] Matthew xxi, 23.

at

at the firſt Paſſover: *Then anſwered the Jews, and ſaid unto him, What ſign ſheweſt thou unto us, ſeeing thou doeſt theſe things*[d]*?*

Now, if the Jews had ſeen this tranſaction in the light of an *act of authority*, or of *violence* againſt the perſons of the merchants, it neither agreed with their *character*, nor indeed with their *principles*, to put this queſtion. *The chief prieſts and elders of the people* are the perſons, who interrogate Jeſus in this manner[e]: and would they, who conſtantly *laid wait for him, that they might accuſe him*[f], let ſlip ſo fair an opportunity of citing him before the Magiſtrate, as a diſturber of the public peace, and a violator of their civil rights and cuſtoms? Inſtead of taking this obvious advantage againſt him, they at once drop all the malice of their character, and only aſk him, in the way of civil and almoſt friendly expoſtulation, *By what authority he did theſe things.* It is certain,

[d] John ii. 18.
[e] Matthew xxi. 23.
[f] Luke xi. 54.

they

they never had ſo ſpecious a pretence, as this affair adminiſtered to them, of bringing a public accuſation againſt him. Yet it ſeems never once to have entered into their thoughts. Nor can it be ſaid, that they ſtood in awe of the *people* (as they ſometimes did, when they were enough diſpoſed to lay hands on him); for the people, in this caſe, when ſo free an attack was made on their privileges, as well as prejudices, would naturally be on their ſide.

But neither would their *Principles* ſuffer them to put this queſtion. Jeſus had, as they conceived, committed a flagrant act of injuſtice, in aſſaulting the perſons of men, who were under the protection of the ſtate: and they call upon him only for *a ſign, ſince he did theſe things.* Is it credible that men, ſo attached, as they were, to their own laws and cuſtoms, ſhould demand, or accept a *ſign*, in ſuch a juncture? Could all Paul's miracles juſtify him, in their opinion, for *not walking after their cuſtoms?*

cuſtoms[g]? Or, would a *ſign* from heaven, of how tranſcendant a nature ſoever, have abſolved Jeſus, in their apprehenſion, from a crime, ſo palpably proved upon him? They would certainly have ſaid, as they did ſay on another occaſion, *We have a law*, which forbids all offences of this ſort; and *by that Law*, he ought to be tried and judged.

Thus, I think, the matter ſtands, if the Jews had regarded Jeſus, in the light of a CRIMINAL. On the other hand, if they ſaw him only in the light of a PROPHET, of one who *aſſumed* that character, and had now, in the way of his office, employed this act to convey ſome important information to them, their conduct was very natural in demanding ſome proof of his being what he pretended to be: and that proof, could be no other than a *ſign*, or miracle; which was the proper evidence of his being a perſon ſent from God.

[g] Acts xxi. 21.

This evidence, indeed, of his prophetic miſſion had already been given to the Jews, in the *ſigns*, or miracles, which he had wrought among them. But they wanted more than a general conviction of his being inveſted with the prophetic character. They were anxious to know by what *authority* he did THESE THINGS; in other words, what *Commiſſion* he had, and how it came to be in his commiſſion, to put the Jews and Gentiles on a level. A prophet he might be; but not a prophet, authorized to declare himſelf ſo roundly, as by this expreſſive act he had done, againſt the peculiar people of God, and in favour of the deſpiſed heathen. Of his commiſſion to publiſh ſuch a doctrine, as this, it was no ordinary *ſign* that would ſatisfy them. They preſſed him, therefore, for ſome *ſign*, purpoſely and expreſsly wrought for this end; ſome *ſign*, ſo extraordinary in itſelf, and ſo peculiarly adapted to the nature of the caſe, as to furniſh an immediate and deciſive anſwer

to

to their demand, *Who gave thee* THIS *authority?*

This queſtion our bleſſed Lord thought fit to elude (for reaſons, which will, in part, appear in the progreſs of this diſcourſe) at both the times, when it was propoſed to him: once, by referring them to the authority of John the Baptiſt: and, again, by referring them (but in ænigmatic terms) to his own reſurrection. Yet even *the Baptiſt* would have let them into ſome part of the ſecret, which they deſired to penetrate; for, knowing the maſter-prejudice of his countrymen, he addreſſed them in theſe remarkable words — *Think not to ſay within yourſelves, We have Abraham for our Father: for I ſay unto you, God is able even of* THESE STONES [h] *to raiſe up children unto Abraham* [i]. And then, for the miracle of his own *reſurrection*, that would not only be the fulleſt proof

[h] By *theſe ſtones*, the antient interpreters univerſally underſtood, *the Gentiles*. See Whitby *in loc.*

[i] Matt. iii. 9.

of his prophetic miſſion, but would, at the ſame time, be the completion of what he was now ſignifying to them, by this prophetic act: for the ſpiritual kingdom of the Meſſiah, into which all the nations were to be admitted, was to take place from that event. *Deſtroy*, ſays he, *this temple* [meaning, as we are told, *the temple of his body*] *and in three days I will build it up* [k]. So that, although Jeſus refuſed to gratify his queſtioners by working inſtantly before them the *ſign*, which they demanded; yet he refers them to *ſuch* a ſign, which would be wrought in due time, and to the very purpoſe of their inquiry; that is, it would be a *ſign*, which ſhould, *both*, demonſtrate his prophetic commiſſion to declare, by this *ſignificant act*, the favour which God intended to confer on the Gentiles, and ſhould, *alſo*, realize his declaration, or ſet before them *the thing ſignified*. Such is the force of that divine

[k] St. John, ch. ii. 19.

anſwer

anſwer—*Deſtroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up.*

Where, by the way, we may, further, obſerve, that the *ſymbolic language*, in which he here predicts his reſurrection, not being at all apprehended by the Jews, was afterwards made the foundation of a charge againſt him, as if he had entertained the criminal *deſign* of deſtroying the temple of Jeruſalem [1]. How much more would his enemies have laid hold on this ſymbolic *act*, which he performed in the temple, in order to found a charge of ſedition againſt him, if they had not conceived of him as acting in the character of a *prophet* only, and ſo had clearly comprehended, at leaſt, the *general* ſcope and meaning of that act!

That it was taken in this light, I mean, of a *prophetic action*, by the very perſons on whom this ſeeming outrage was committed, may be reaſonably preſumed, ſince they make no reſiſtance to it, nor com-

[1] Matthew xxvi. 61.

plain of any injury, done them by it: a conduct, very ſtrange and unlikely, if the parties concerned had received any conſiderable damage; or if they conceived, that any *intended* violence had been offered to them. It is plain, they conſidered the whole tranſaction, as a piece of *ſcenery*, or repreſentation only; under the cover of which Chriſt propoſed, in the manner of the Eaſtern ſages, and eſpecially of the Jewiſh prophets, to convey ſome momentous information to them, and to impreſs it with much force and energy on their minds.

Nor can it be concluded from the narration of the Evangeliſts, that any thing more was intended by their maſter. They relate this adventure, ſimply as *a matter of fact*; and it could not well be related otherwiſe, for the *information* was given in the *fact*. They intermix, indeed, no explanation; becauſe they probably ſaw not, any more than the generality of the by-ſtanders, the *ſpecific* information, it

was

was meant to convey. They only ſaw, in general, that *ſome* information was the end and purpoſe of the act. The ruling Jews, who interrogated Jeſus concerning this act, I have no doubt, ſaw or ſuſpected, at leaſt, the real drift of it. But, as Jeſus could not be brought to explain himſelf by any direct anſwer, they were left to their own concluſions about it; and were content, we may ſuppoſe, to keep theſe concluſions to themſelves: the rather, as the turn, which our Lord thought fit to give to this act, as if it reſpected only the honour of God's houſe, put it out of their power to charge that other meaning, deciſively, upon him.

We may further obſerve, that the *hiſtory* of this fact is not be conſtrued with the utmoſt rigour. Some of the Evangeliſts expreſs themſelves in ſuch terms, as, in the ſtrict ſenſe of them, imply, that Jeſus actually drove all the beaſts and traffickers out of the temple. But we need only ſuppoſe that he applied himſelf to this ac-

tion, *as if* his purpoſe had been actually to drive them all out; and that he continued to employ himſelf in it in ſuch ſort, and for ſo long a time, as that the perſons preſent might take notice of what he did, and ſo be able (I do not ſay immediately, but in due ſeaſon) to interpret this *ſign*, together with Iſaiah's *prophecy*, in the manner he intended. I ſay, *we need only ſuppoſe this*; becauſe, if no more was done by Jeſus, the Evangeliſts, in their conciſe and ſimple way of narration, would naturally expreſs themſelves, as they have done, in their accounts of this fact: and I believe, if we conſider the accounts, we have of many other informations *by action*, recorded in the old Scriptures, we ſhall find it neceſſary to underſtand them with ſome ſuch reſtrictions and qualifications.

If, after all, it be thought, that ſome *violence* was offered to the merchants, and that ſome *inconvenience* was ſuffered by them, in conſequence of it; I ſuppoſe they deſerved this puniſhment for their pol-

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lution of the temple; and I admit that the prophetic character of Jeſus authorized him, in the courſe of his miniſtry, to inflict it; juſt as, without doubt, it authorized him to deſtroy the barren *fig-tree*, when it ſerved his purpoſe to diſcharge a part of his office by making uſe of that *emblem*, though it might be with ſome loſs to the propietor of it. The caſe was the ſame here, when he drove the traffickers from their ſtation. But there is a wide difference between ſuppoſing the *violence*, offered to them, to be the *direct and proper purpoſe* of the act, and the *incidental effect* of it. And the ſilence of the merchants themſelves, under this violence, ſufficiently ſhews, as I obſerved, that they *felt* this difference.

But the main difficulty, perhaps, is ſtill behind. For, it will be aſked, Why was this *myſterious* method uſed by our Saviour at all, in conveying the ſuppoſed momentous information, when he might have expreſſed his meaning *directly* in plain words?

1. One reaſon, I ſuppoſe, might be, the inveterate and inſurmountable prejudices of the Jewiſh Converts to this part of the Meſſiah's character. For, though the prophets had given frequent, and ſometimes the moſt clear, deſcriptions of it: yet, ſo poſſeſſed were they with the notion of their *being*, and of their *continuing* to be, even under the diſpenſation of their Meſſiah, a choſen and peculiar people, that they never could hear (no, not the Apoſtles themſelves, till enlightened by the holy Spirit, and by a ſpecial revelation for that purpoſe; they could never hear, I ſay) without the utmoſt indignation, *That God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles* [m]. This indirect information was then in condeſcenſion to the weakneſs of his own diſciples and followers.

And of this tenderneſs to their infirmities we have a remarkable inſtance in the caſe of the *fig-tree*, ſo often mentioned; the drift of which was unqueſtionably to

[m] Acts xiv, 27.

denote

denote the approaching *rejection of the Jews*, for their unfruitfulneſs under the means of Grace, and their rejection of the Meſſiah. But, the minds of the diſciples being too infirm, at this time, to bear the open communication of ſo mortifying a truth, Jeſus purpoſely diverts them from the main purpoſe of that miracle (though it was wrought, and the *ſign* given, for their future information and recollection) and turns their attention on another and very remote circumſtance, *the efficacy of faith* to enable them to work this and greater miracles[n]. But it was a *general* rule with our Lord to conſult the infirmities of his diſciples, and to communicate to them only ſo much of his purpoſes and councils, as they could bear; leaving the reſt to be collected by them, in due time, from caſual hints and obſcure paſſages, when they ſhould afterwards call them to mind, and be in a condition, under the influence of the holy Spirit, to profit by

[n] Mark xi. 21, 24.

them.

them. Thus, in John xvi. 12. *I have yet many things to ſay to you, but* YE CANNOT BEAR THEM NOW: and then refers them to the ſpirit of truth, for further information.

Connected with this tenderneſs for his diſciples,

2. A *further* reaſon, without doubt, was a prudential regard to the general *ſucceſs* of his miniſtry, with the reſt of the Jews.

For that great event, the call of the Gentiles, was not to take place during the life of Jeſus; *who was ſent only to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael*[o]; that is, he was *perſonally* to addreſs himſelf only to THEM; the converſion of the Heathen being to be effected, after his aſcenſion, by the miniſtry of his Apoſtles and followers. Hence, had our Saviour plainly unfolded this ſecret to the Jews, he would certainly have indiſpoſed them for paying any regard to his Miſſion. And yet, ſo important a part of his character was not to be wholly

[o] Matthew xv. 24.

concealed,

concealed. It was therefore ſignified in this covert way; and (being itſelf a prophecy of ſomething yet to be deferred) in the mode, and with the uſual obſcurity, of a prophetic information.

What I have juſt now obſerved of the caution with which our Lord revealed his purpoſe of calling the Gentiles, explains the reaſon why St. John's account of the *firſt* tranſaction in the temple, differs ſo much from that which the other Evangeliſts give of the *ſecond*. Jeſus had juſt entered on his prophetic office, when he uſed the *ſign* of purging the temple, of which St. John ſpeaks: he therefore leaves the Jews to their own interpretation of that ſign, ſaying only, *Take theſe things hence: make not my Father's houſe an houſe of merchandize*; as though a zeal for that houſe had been his ſole inducement to make uſe of it: and accordingly the diſciples, as I before obſerved, ſo underſtood him. But, when he thought fit to employ this *ſignificative action* a ſecond time,

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of which the other Evangeliſts only ſpeak, his miniſtry was then drawing to a concluſion. So that he is now leſs ſcrupulous of giving offence, and does all but directly interpret the ſign himſelf, by referring his hearers to the prophecy of Iſaiah, which was the proper key to it—*He taught them, ſaying, Is it not written, My houſe ſhall be called the houſe of prayer for all the nations*[p]? Still, there was ſome obſcurity, which he did not think fit altother to remove: but he had ſaid enough to correct their former haſty concluſion. For we are not told by thoſe other Evangeliſts, as we are by St. John, that the diſciples conſidered what they had ſeen their Maſter do, as a pure act of *zeal* for the honour of the temple: the prophecy, without doubt, ſuggeſted ſomething to their minds, which led them to apprehend a farther and higher purpoſe in that tranſaction.

[p] Mark xi. 17.

3. Laſtly,

3. Laſtly, we may ſuppoſe, that the information was given in this *ſymbolic way*, that, when men ſaw the event, they might be the more ſtrongly convinced of its being Chriſt's intention it ſhould come to paſs, by calling to mind the ſenſible and ſtriking manner, in which it had been predicted by him.

For theſe, or other reaſons, the method here employed by Chriſt to ſignify his intended favour to the Gentiles, might be moſt proper. In the mean time, as I ſaid, this intention was not wholly to be concealed: for then the call of the Gentiles might be deemed an after-thought, and not to have been originally in his commiſſion. Accordingly, it is intimated very frequently in our Lord's diſcourſes to the Jews, and opened more clearly on many occaſions to his Apoſtles; and was, in truth, ſo much in his view, and ſo conſtantly preſent to him, that, as we now find, it was one of the *firſt*, and *laſt* things he did, to go into the temple, and, by

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an expreſſive ſign, to declare his gracious purpoſe towards the Heathen.

We may, further, obſerve (ſo intent was the Divine Providence on gradually unveiling *the glory of this myſtery*[q], as St. Paul terms it) that the moment our bleſſed Lord expired on the croſs, *the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom:* a *ſign*, to ſome purpoſe, of that great event which Jeſus had foretold, and which God himſelf held forth to the aſtoniſhed Jews, as the cleareſt emblem of his purpoſed favour to the Gentiles; when the Sanctuary itſelf, as well as the outermoſt court of their temple, was thus laid open to the acceſs, and vindicated to the uſe, of all nations.

Finally, in due time, this purpoſe was clearly and explicitly made known to Peter, in his famous viſion: and thus it pleaſed God to reveal this adorable myſtery, "The ſalvation of the Gentile world," (which, though not the *imme-*

[q] Coloſſ. i. 27.

diate,

diate, was the moſt important end of Chriſt's commiſſion) by every mode of communication, which he had ever employed in his intercourſe with mankind; by the *word of prophecy* — by *ſimilitudes*, *by the hand of Jeſus* — by an *extraordinary ſign from heaven* — and by *Viſion*.

After ſo minute a commentary on this famous act, of *Chriſt's driving the buyers and ſellers out of the temple*, may I be permitted to conclude, that it, now, ſtands clear of thoſe difficulties, which have been uſually found in it? — It was no indecent ſtart of zeal in our Lord: it was no violent invaſion of the rights of any: it was no act of civil authority, uſurped by him: but a *prophetic information*, conveyed in a *prophetic form*, of an event, the moſt important to mankind, and to the accompliſhment of his own office and miniſtry. It was a calm, rational, inoffenſive act; not unworthy the perſon of our bleſſed Lord; or, rather, full of

that wisdom, which adorned his character, and shone out in all his conduct and conversation.

THE END.

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